

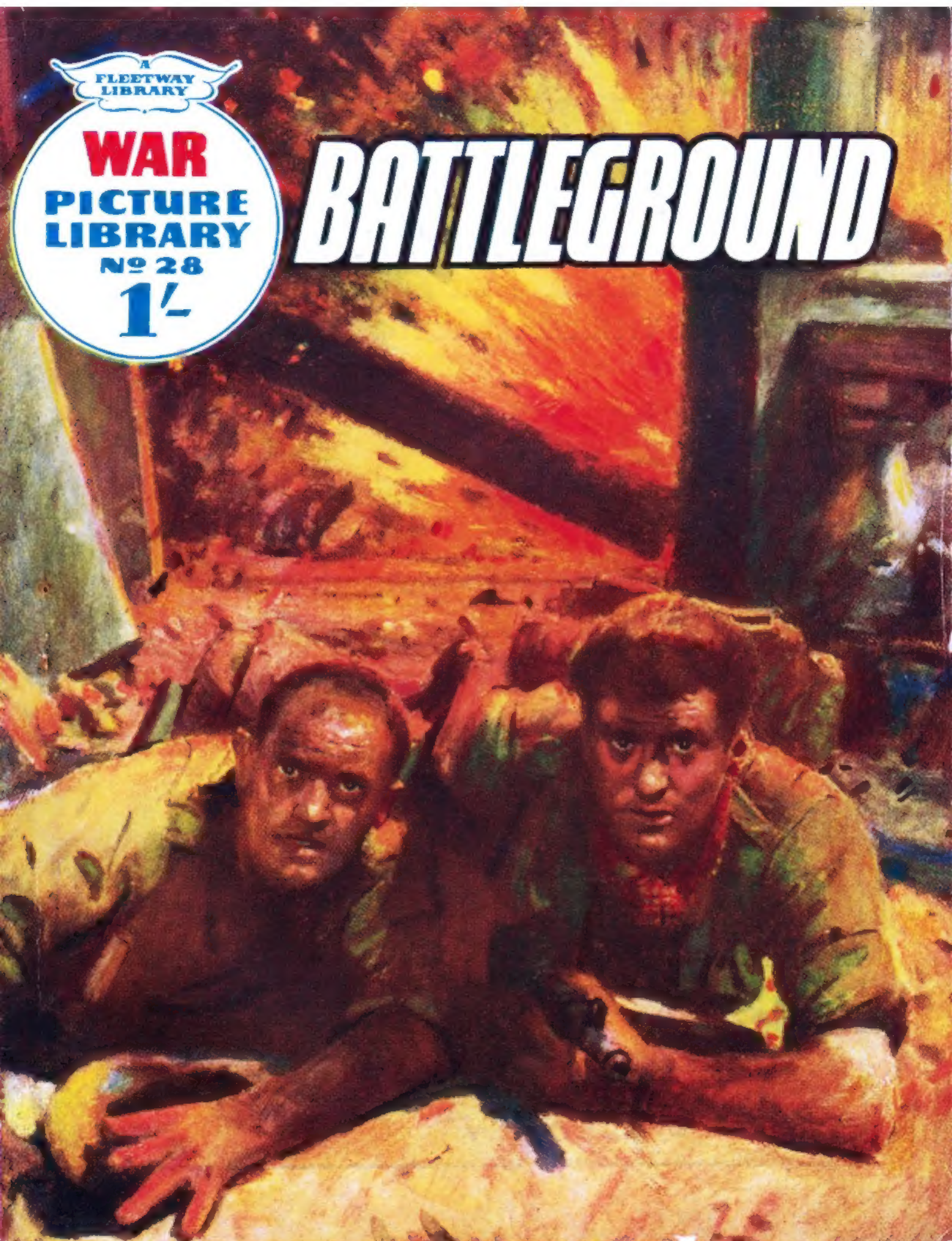
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# **BATTLEGROUND**





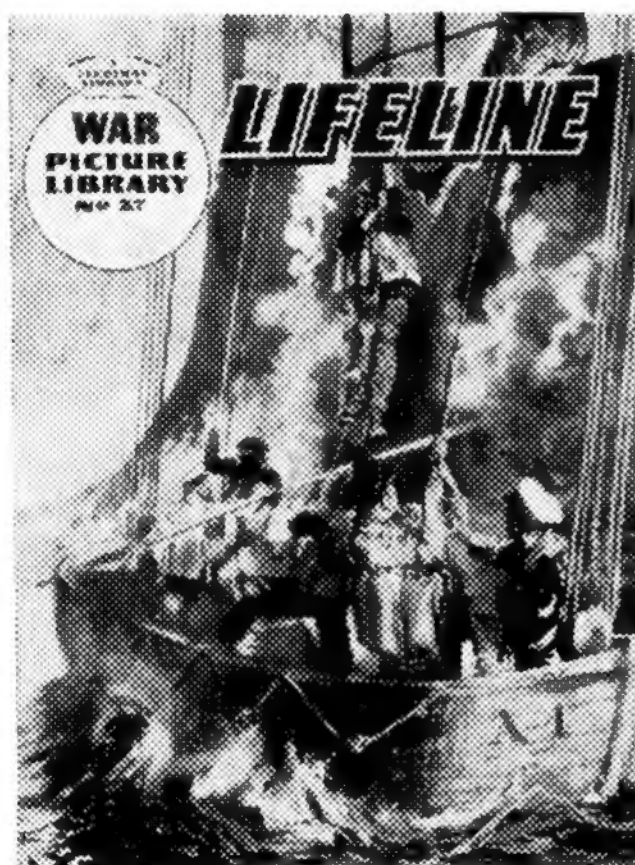
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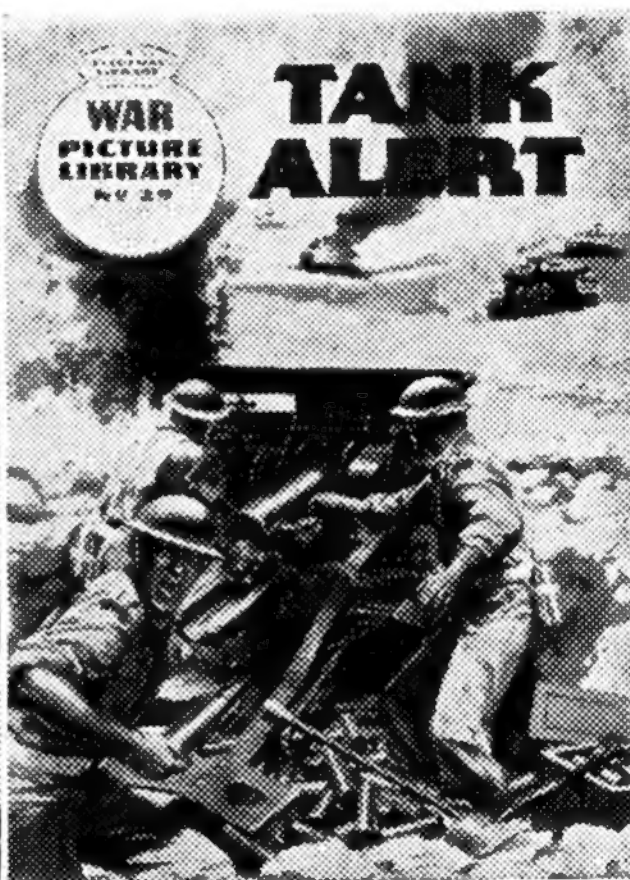
**FOR WAR THRILLS...ACTION...DRAMA...**

**No. 27 LIFELINE**

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To be attacked and not be able to hit back—such was the lot of the men of the Merchant Navy who carried the life-giving food and war materials through enemy-infested seas to beleaguered Britain.



The gunners of the Eighth Army were fighting men, proudly taking their place beside the infantrymen in the thrust and counter-thrust of the long and bitter Western Desert Campaign.

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**NEXT MONTH'S** three exciting issues are :—

**No. 30 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE**

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# BATTLEGROUND

THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE WAS FORGED IN 1941 IN THE BITTER FIRES OF DESERT WARFARE. ITS JEEP PATROLS, MANNED BY BRAVE AND ADVENTUROUS MEN FROM MANY UNITS OF THE BRITISH ARMY, PROBED DEEP BEHIND THE ENEMY'S FRONT LINE TO STRIKE AT THE VULNERABLE HEART OF ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS. ITS BADGE WAS THE FLYING DAGGER.

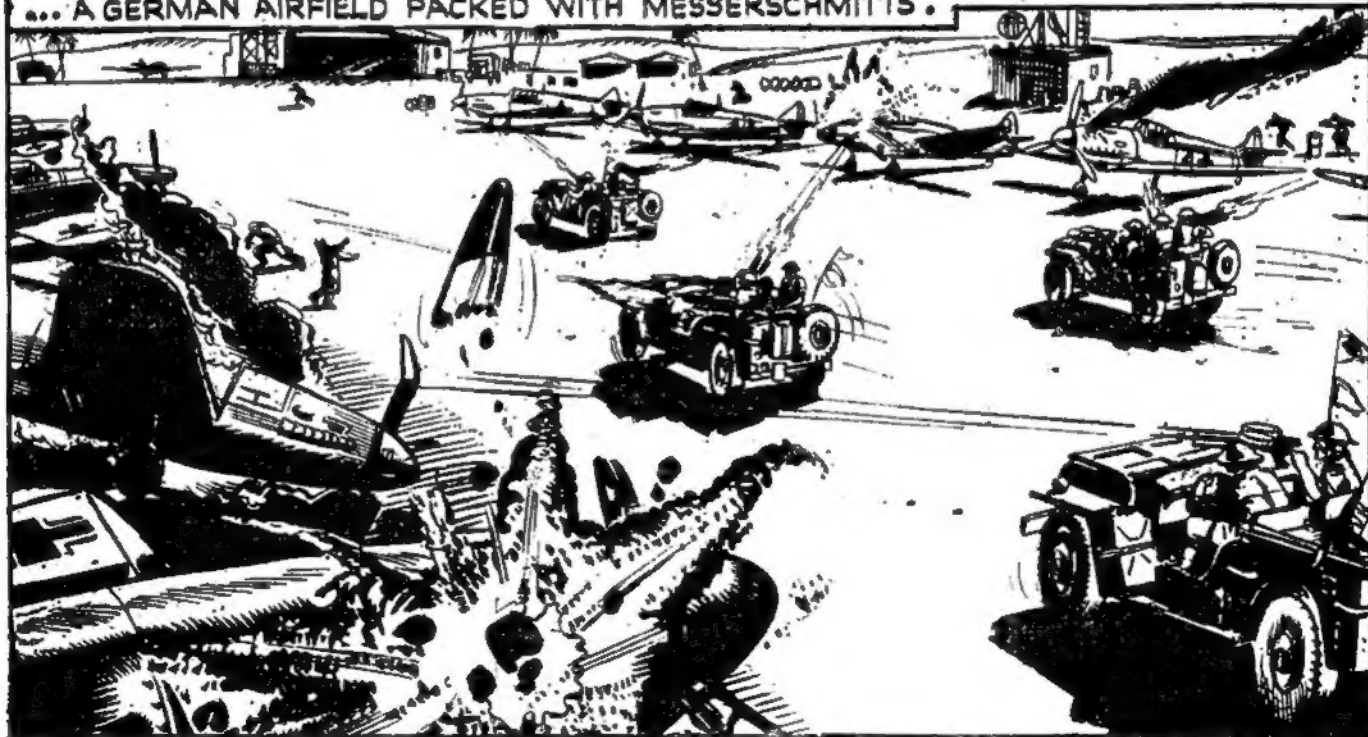


*Chapter 1.***AIRFIELD ASSAULT**

MAJOR SIMON PARRISH, D.S.O. HAD LED ONE OF THE FIRST S.A.S. PATROLS EVER TO GO INTO ACTION. VETERAN OF MANY A VICIOUS DESERT SKIRMISH, HE HAD VEHEMENTLY REFUSED THE DESK JOB IN CAIRO TO WHICH HIS AGE AND SENIORITY ENTITLED HIM.



NOW, TWO HUNDRED MILES BEHIND THE ENEMY LINES, HE LED HIS PATROL INTO ACTION AGAIN. THE TARGET WAS AN OLD FAVOURITE OF THE DAREDEVIL MEN OF THE S.A.S. ... A GERMAN AIRFIELD PACKED WITH MESSERSCHMITTS.

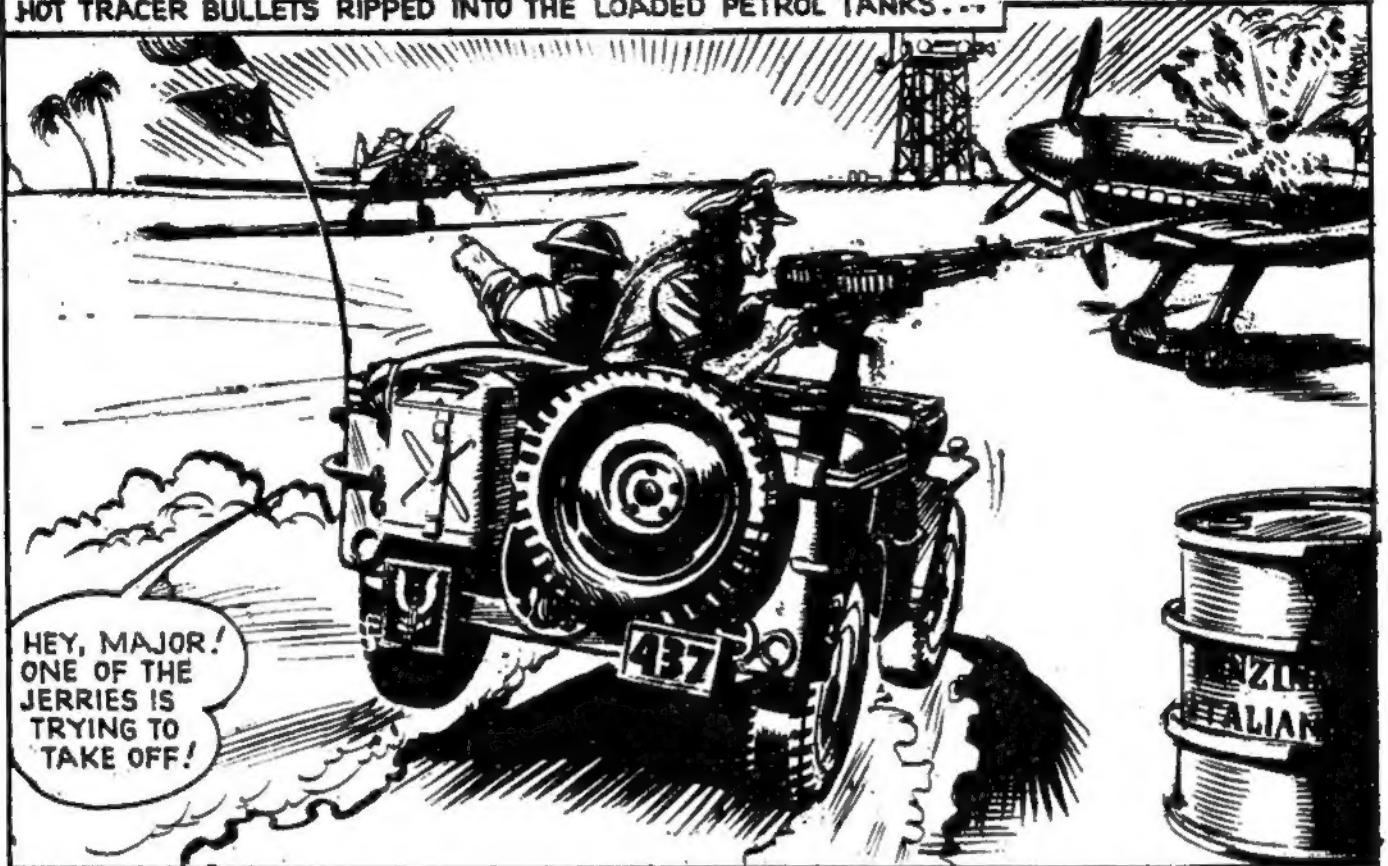




## Battleground

3

THE SUDDENNESS OF THEIR ATTACK TAKING THE GERMANS UTTERLY BY SURPRISE, THE JEEPS SCREAMED IN TWO COLUMNS ALONG THE RUNWAY BETWEEN THE PARKED FIGHTERS. RED-HOT TRACER BULLETS RIPPED INTO THE LOADED PETROL TANKS...

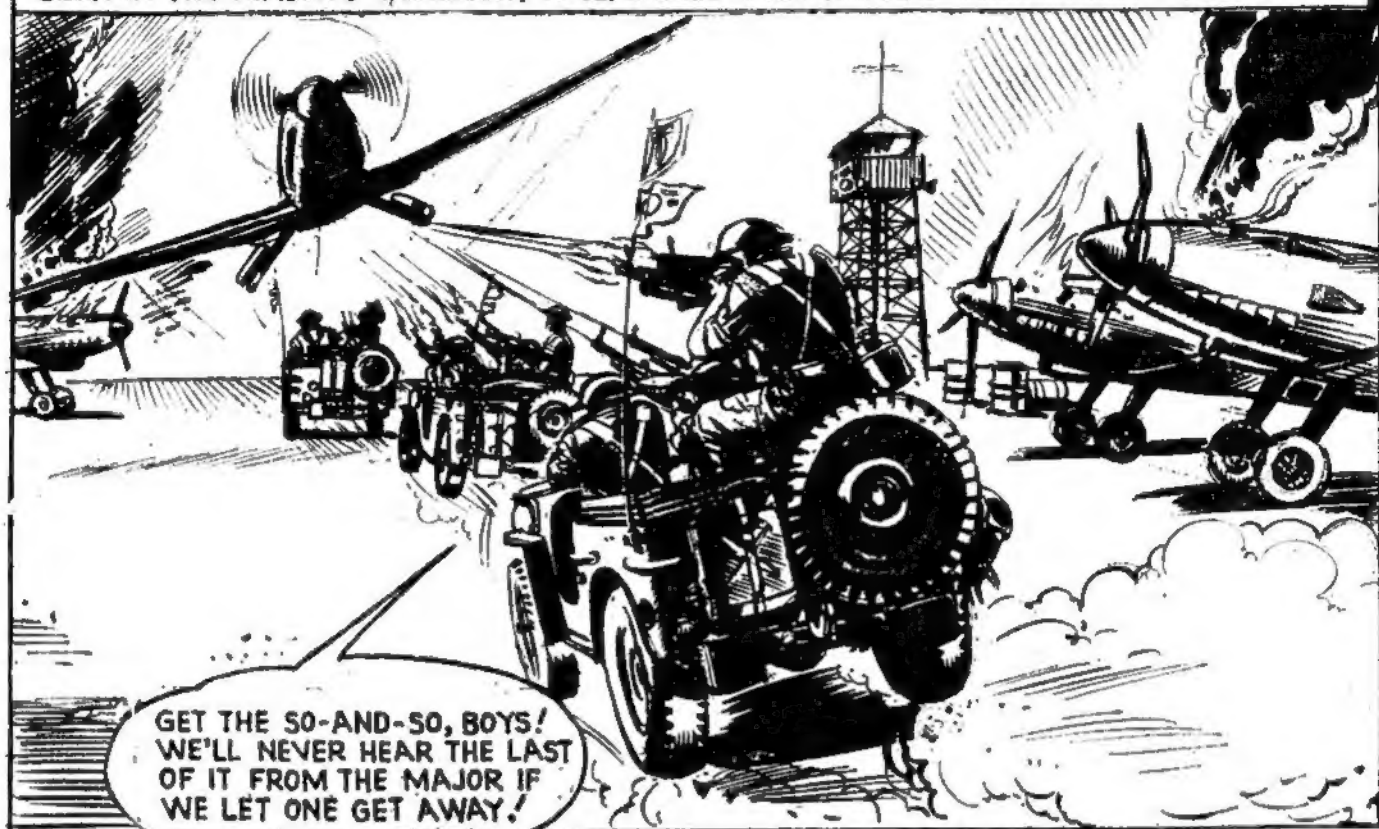


ONE MESSERSCHMITT HAD BEEN POISED FOR TAKE-OFF, AND ITS PILOT WAS A BRAVE MAN. DEFYING THE S.A.S. GUNS, HE REACHED HIS PLANE.



# Battleground

ACCELERATING VICIOUSLY, THE GERMAN FIGHTER SCREAMED ALONG THE RUNWAY. A MERE BLUR IN THE MAJOR'S GUNSIGHT, IT SLAMMED OVER THE JEEP WITH INCHES TO SPARE.



TRACER CLAWED AT THE LONE MESSERSCHMITT AS IT ROCKETED OVER THE PATROL, FIGHTING FOR HEIGHT, BUT ALREADY MAJOR PARRISH HAD WEIGHED THE THREAT OF THAT ESCAPING GERMAN FIGHTER AND WAS SHOUTING QUICK ORDERS...



TYRES SHRIEKING, THE JEEPS SWUNG ROUND ON THEIR TRACKS BETWEEN THE BURNING PLANES. THERE WAS NO TIME TO LOSE. ALREADY, VENGEFUL EYES WERE WATCHING THEIR BELLIGERENT RETREAT FROM THE AIRFIELD'S CONTROL TOWER.

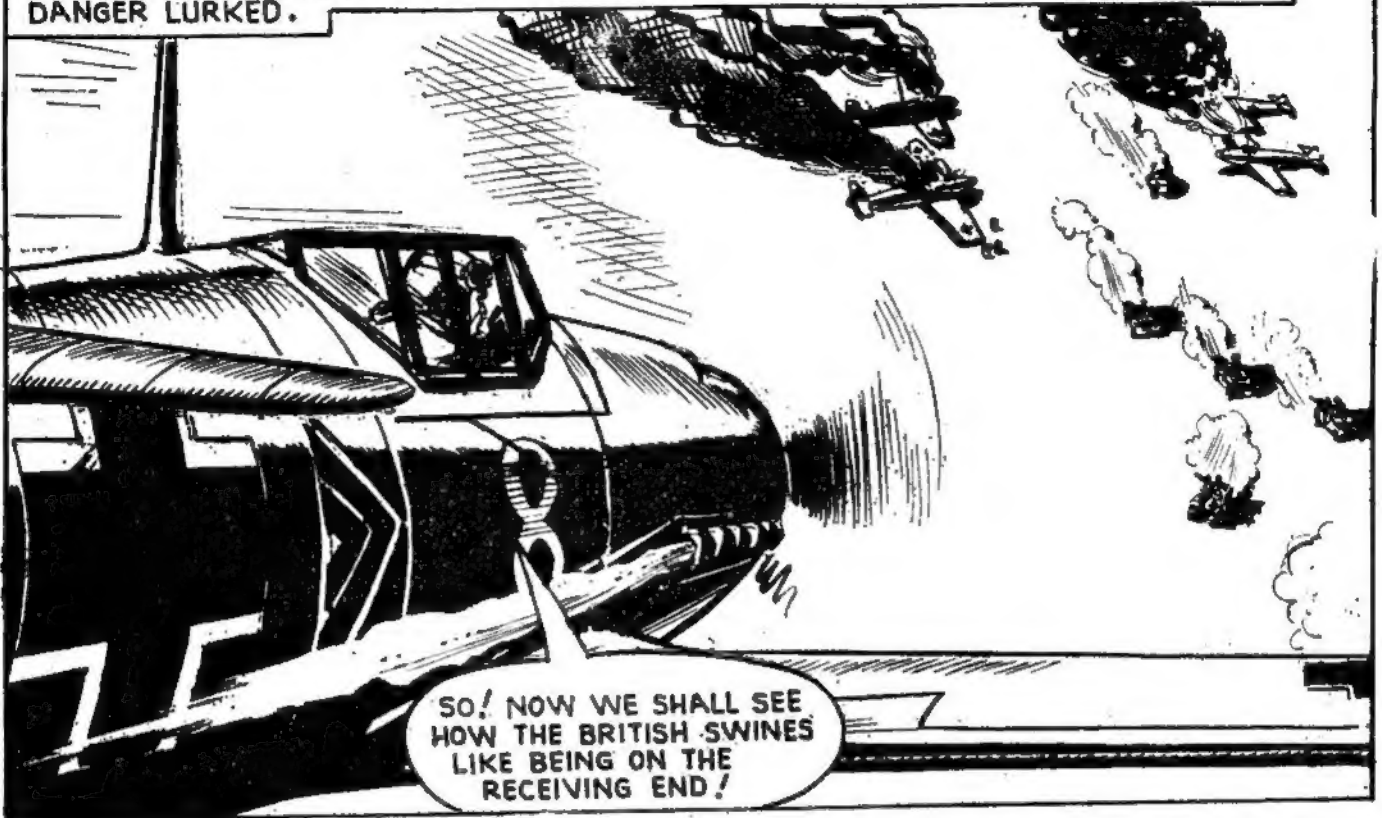


THE ONE AIRBORNE MESSERSCHMITT WAS A DEADLY THREAT TO THE S.A.S. PATROL. IF IT ATTACKED AND BROKE UP THAT TIGHT FORMATION BEFORE IT COULD MELT BACK INTO THE DESERT WASTES, THE HANDFUL OF BRAVE MEN MIGHT BE TRAPPED. AND AT THIS DESPERATE MOMENT...



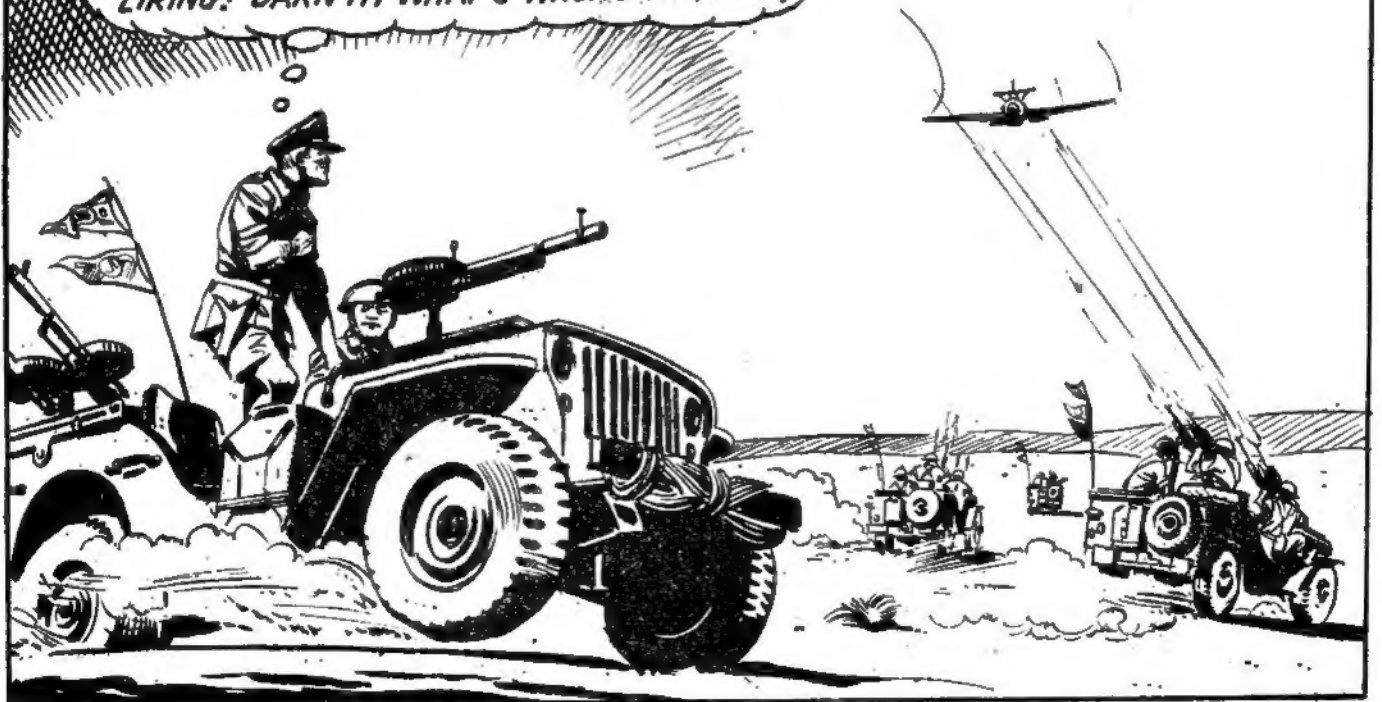


SERGEANT TOM MERRAL HAD SEEN A FLICKER OF PAIN CROSS HIS COMMANDER'S LEAN FACE. AND THOUGH THE FAMILIAR STEELY VOICE CUT SHORT HIS WORRIED QUESTION, THE VETERAN SOLDIER LOOKED PALE AND DRAWN. IN THE SKY, DANGER LURKED.



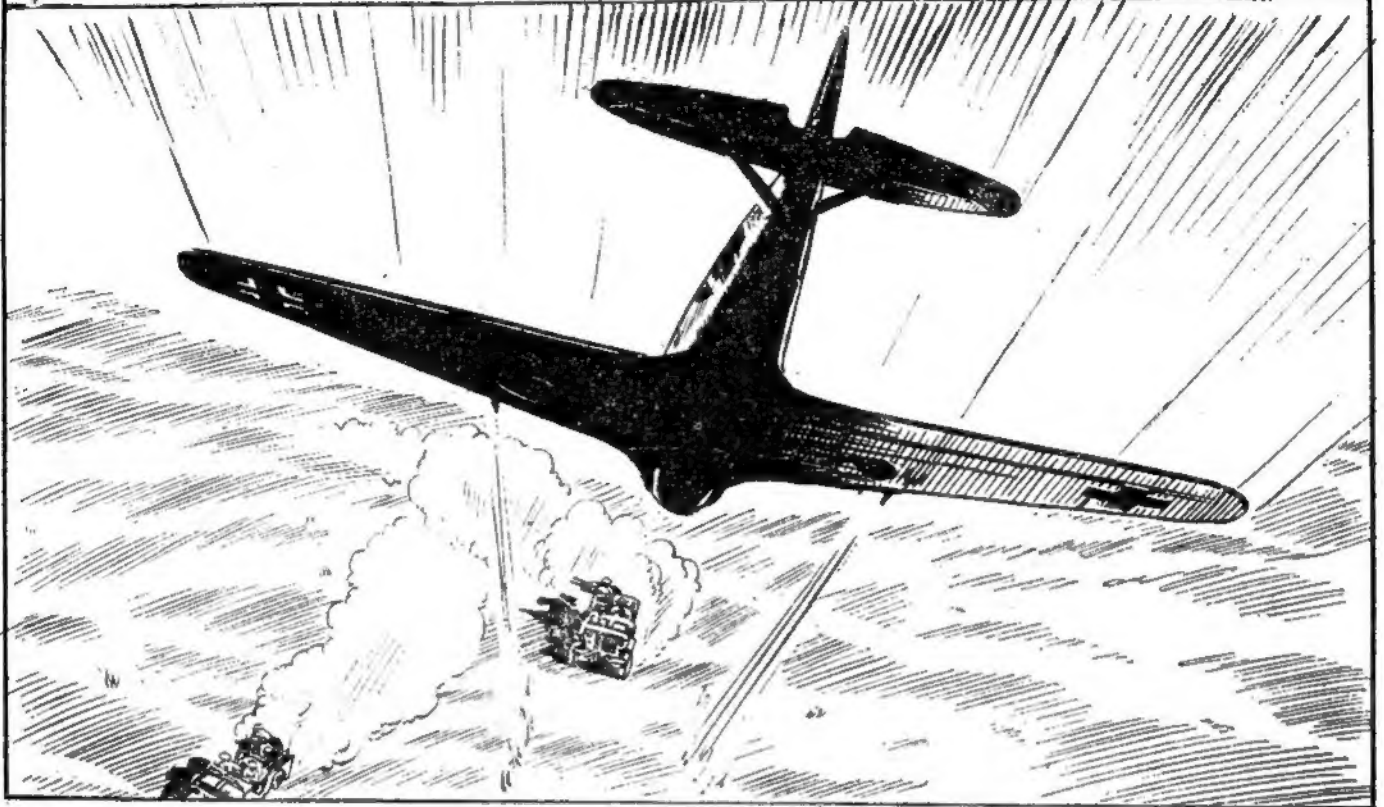
BUT MAJOR SIMON PARRISH, D.S.O. HAD FACED DANGER HUNDREDS OF TIMES BEFORE, AND FACED IT WITH A COOL SMILE. AN ATTACK BY A SINGLE ENEMY FIGHTER WAS HARDLY LIKELY TO WORRY HIM.

I MUST BE LOSING MY GRIP TO HAVE LET THAT JERRY GET AWAY! AND HE'S COMING IN TOO DEVILISH LOW FOR MY LIKING! DARN IT, WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?





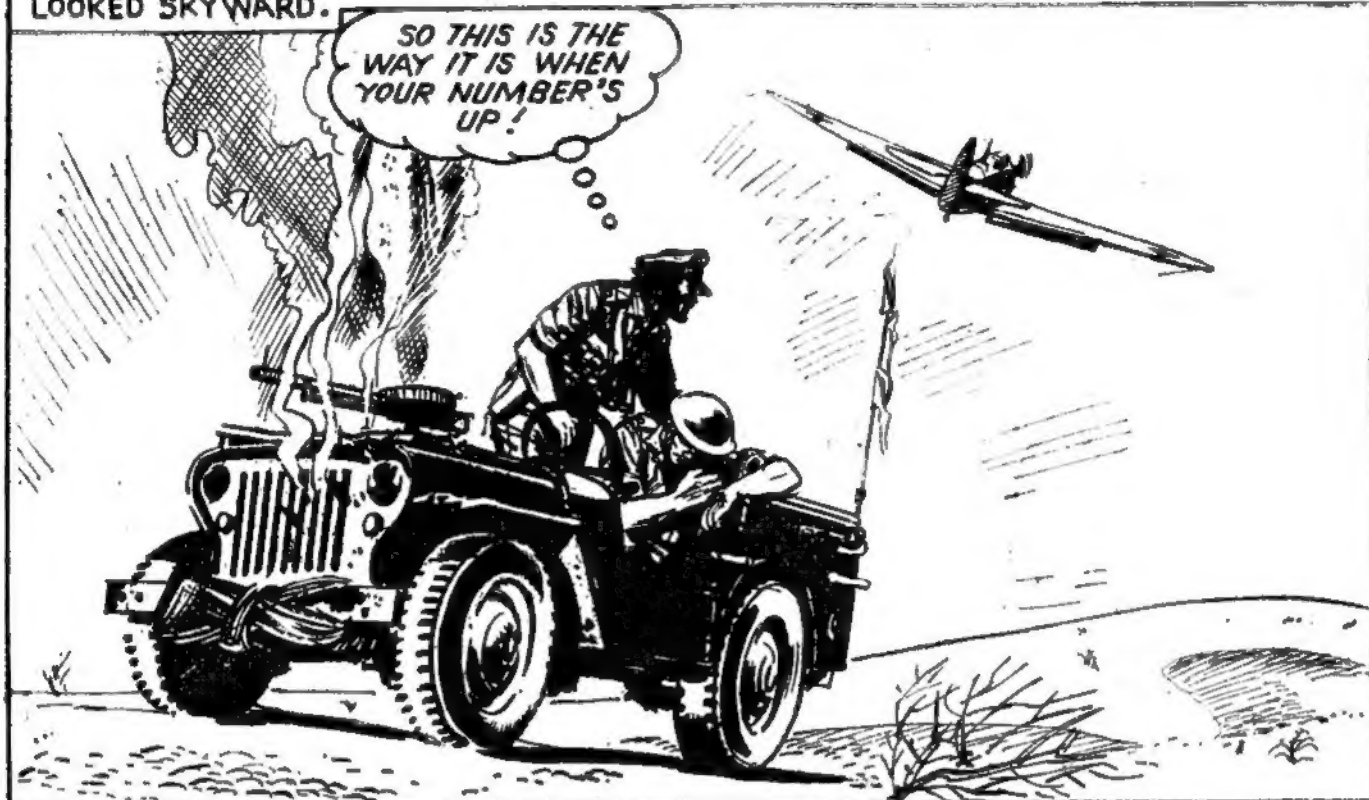
THE JEEPS HAD FANNED OUT TO PRESENT A MORE DIFFICULT TARGET TO THE NAZI PILOT. THEIR GUNS HAMMERED ANGRILY BUT THE MESSERSCHMITT CAME ON IN A SEARING POWER DIVE AIMED RELENTLESSLY. IT SEEMED, AT THE PATROL LEADER'S JEEP.



THE MAJOR'S REACTIONS WERE NOT AS FAST AS USUAL. BEFORE HE HAD SWUNG THE GUN INTO A FIRING POSITION, BULLETS PECKED A DEADLY PATTERN ACROSS THE SAND AND STRUCK AT THE JEEP.



THE MESSERSCHMITT'S FIRST BURST RIPPED INTO THE WING OF THE JEEP, WRECKING THE ENGINE AND WOUNDING TOM MERRAL. THE BRUTAL SUDDENNESS OF THE ATTACK SEEMED TO HAVE DAZED THE TOUGH MAJOR. HE REACHED OUT TO THE SERGEANT AND LOOKED SKYWARD.



VENOMOUSLY, THE MESSERSCHMITT ROARED DOWN IN A SECOND ATTACK ON THE NOW STATIONARY AND HELPLESS JEEP...





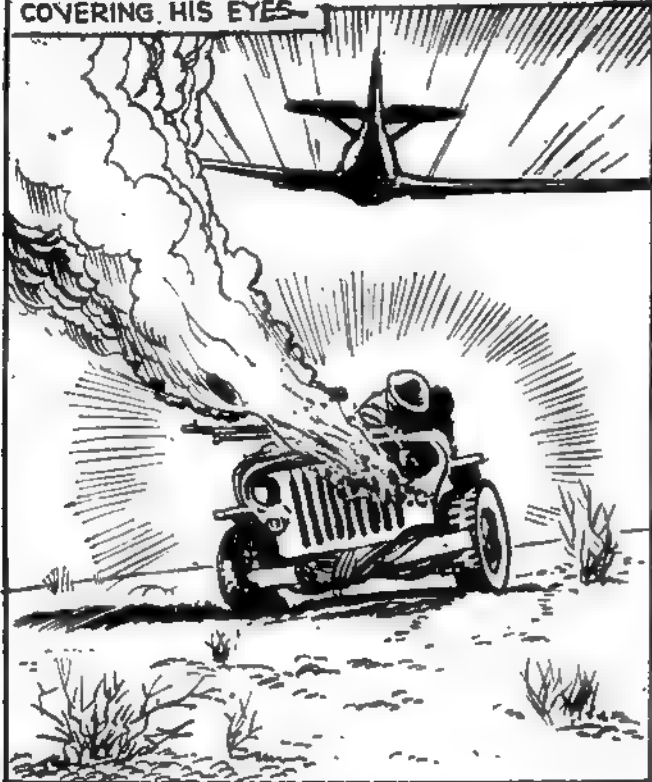
THE AERO ENGINE SCREAMING IN HIS EARS, MAJOR PARRISH GROPED CLUMSILY FOR THE MACHINE-GUN. SOMETHING STRANGE WAS HAPPENING TO HIM. THE OLD SWIFT RESPONSE BETWEEN COOL HANDS AND QUICK BRAIN HAD BROKEN DOWN.



AS THE MAJOR LOOKED UP, THE UGLY BLACK SHAPE OF THE MESSERSCHMITT LOOMED GIGANTICALLY AHEAD. DEATH SPAT IN HIS FACE...



THE JEEP BOILED INTO FLAME AS THE HURRICANE OF LEAD SMASHED INTO ITS PETROL TANKS. AND IN THAT BLAZING INFERNO A STILL FIGURE SAT, ONE HAND COVERING HIS EYES.



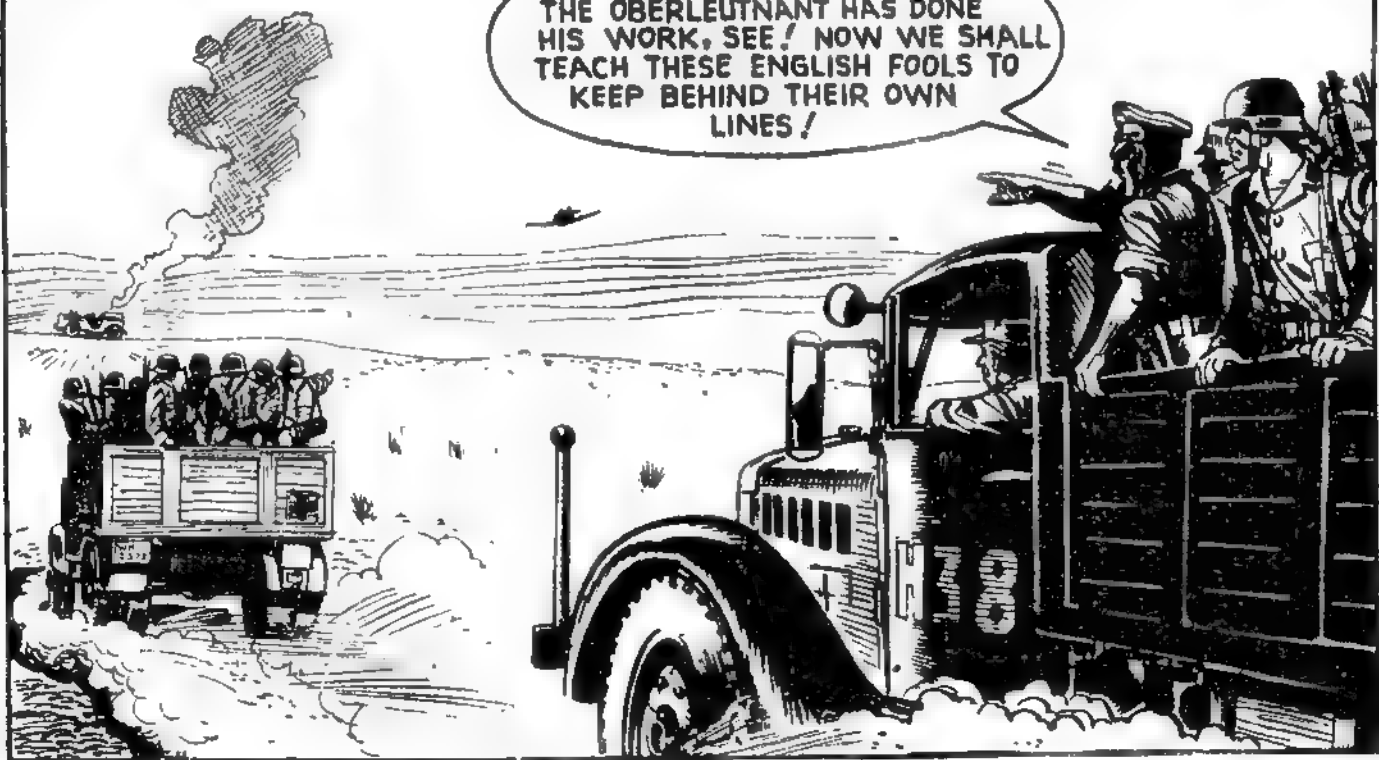
A MILE AHEAD, THE OTHER JEEPS OF THE PATROL WERE TURNING. IT WAS MADNESS TO TURN BACK, BUT NO ORDER WAS GIVEN NO ORDER WAS NEEDED. *THE MAJOR WAS IN TROUBLE!*

THE MAJOR'S BOUGHT IT! WE CAN'T LEAVE HIM THERE!



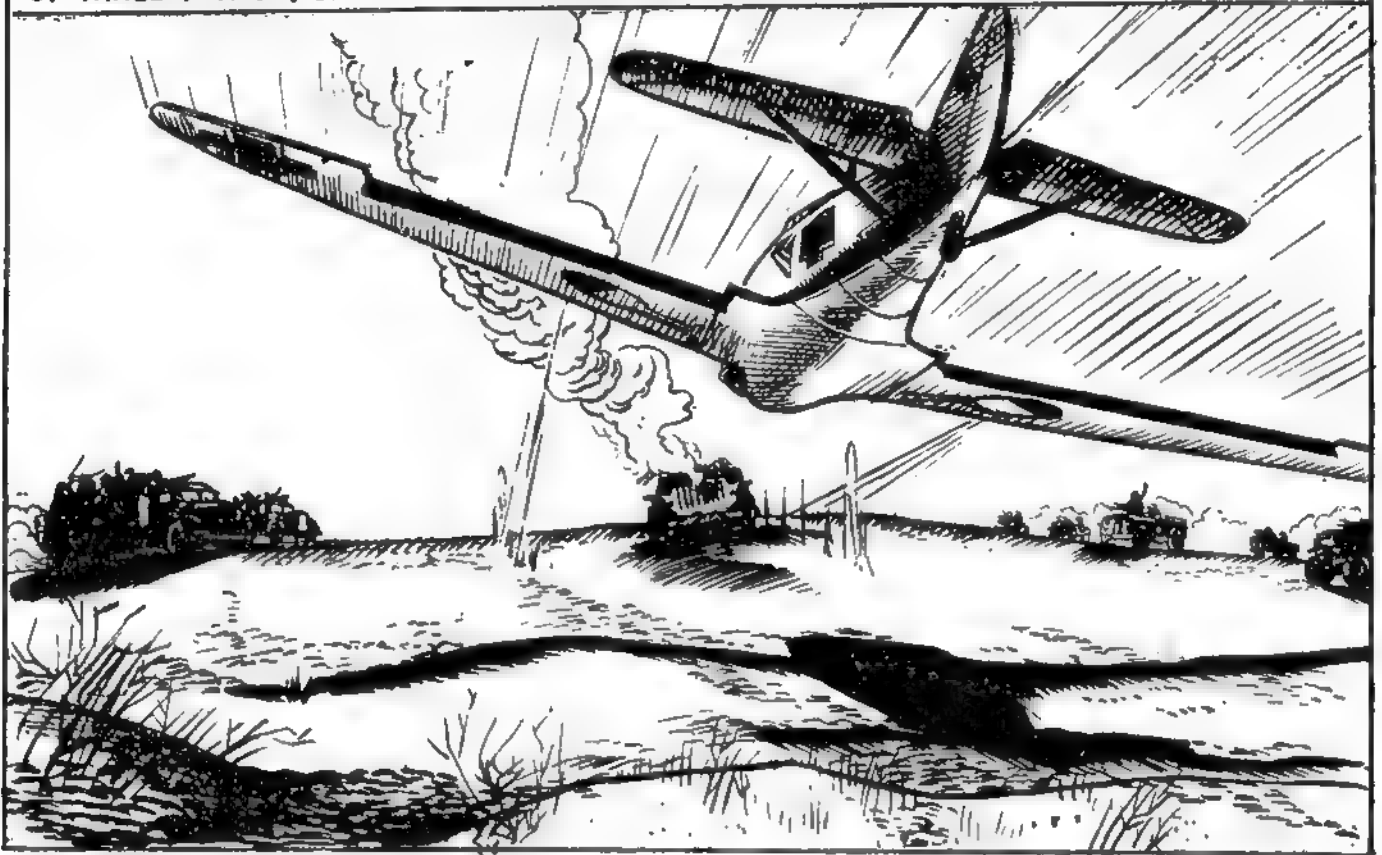
AS THE S.A.S. JEEPS ROARED BACK TOWARDS THE STRICKEN PATROL LEADER, THE MESSERSCHMITT BANKED VENGEFULLY TO MAKE YET ANOTHER ATTACK. AND TWO MILES AWAY ACROSS THE DESERT SAND A MORE DEADLY GERMAN FORCE APPROACHED...

THE OBERLEUTNANT HAS DONE HIS WORK, SEE! NOW WE SHALL TEACH THESE ENGLISH FOOLS TO KEEP BEHIND THEIR OWN LINES!





A WEIRD MAGNET UNDER ITS PALL OF OILY SMOKE, THE SOLITARY JEEP WAS THE FOCUS OF THREE FORCES, ONE OF THEM INTENT ON RESCUE. THE OTHERS ON THE KILL.



ENGINES WHINING, THE S.A.S. JEEPS CLAWED THEIR WAY DESPERATELY ACROSS THE LOOSE SAND. AS THE RANGE CLOSED, MACHINE-GUNS SPAT LEAD DEFIANCE AT THE GERMAN TRUCKS AND THE DIVING AIRCRAFT OVERHEAD.



AS THE DESERT PATROL SWEEP IN A TIGHT DEFENSIVE BARRICADE AROUND THEIR LEADER, THE DEADLY BRITISH GUNS FOUND THEIR MARK. ONE GERMAN TRUCK LURCHED OMINOUSLY UNDER THE HAIL OF BULLETS. A TONGUE OF FLAME LICKED ALONG THE MESSERSCHMITT'S WING...





THE LIEUTENANT HAD ALREADY REACHED THE BURNING JEEP. WITH A GASP OF RELIEF, HE SAW THAT HIS COMMANDER WAS ALIVE. IT WAS A MIRACLE -- BUT THERE WAS NO TIME FOR WONDER.



HALF CARRYING THE HELPLESS MAJOR, THE YOUNG OFFICER STRUGGLED BACK TO HIS JEEP AND FLUNG AN ORDER AT HIS DRIVER.



WITH THEIR TWO WOUNDED COMRADES SAFE, THE S.A.S. PATROL WITHDREW AT SPEED. THEIR GUNS HAD DESTROYED EIGHTEEN MESSERSCHMITTS ON THE GROUND AND CLAWED ONE OUT OF THE AIR... AND A GERMAN OFFICER WAS LEFT TO SHAKE HIS FIST AT THE TRIUMPHANT DUST OF THEIR DEPARTURE.



BUT THE PATROL STILL HAD TWO HUNDRED MILES OF TRACKLESS DESERT TO COVER BEFORE THEY REACHED THE BRITISH LINES. ALL THAT DAY THEY TRAVELLED. AND AT NOON ON THE NEXT, HALTED FOR A BRIEF REST.



THE PATROL'S MEDICO, AN EX-R.A.M.C. PRIVATE, HAD DONE HIS BEST FOR THE TWO WOUNDED MEN, BUT HE WAS UNEASY ABOUT MAJOR PARRISH.



FOR ANOTHER TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, THE S.A.S. PATROL ROARED ON ACROSS THE BURNING WASTES. AT NOON THE NEXT DAY, A FORWARD PATROL OF AN INFANTRY REGIMENT, DUG INTO FOXHOLES SOUTH OF EL ALAMEIN, SAW A CLOUD OF DUST IN THE WEST.





CAPTAIN MATT ARMSTRONG, LEADING THE PATROL, WATCHED THE DUST CLOUD WITH GRIM DETERMINATION. BUT AS THE S.A.S. JEEPS EMERGED FROM IT HIS JAW RELAXED AND HE SMILED. IT WAS AN ADMIRING SMILE.

S.A.S. PATROL, CAPTAIN. WE GOT SHOT UP ON THE WAY BACK. TWO MEN WOUNDED... ONE OF THEM'S MAJOR SIMON PARRISH!

THERE'S A FIELD HOSPITAL TEN MILES ON, LIEUTENANT! I'LL RADIO THROUGH TO H.Q. TO WARN THEM YOU'RE COMING!



THE YOUNG INFANTRY CAPTAIN HAD HEARD WILD STORIES OF THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE AND OF MAJOR SIMON PARRISH, D.S.O., AND HE HAD ENVIED THOSE DAREDEVIL WARRIORS ON WHEELS.

THAT'S THE WAY TO FIGHT A WAR... ROAMING FREE TWO HUNDRED MILES BEHIND THE LINES WITH A MAN LIKE SIMON PARRISH, NOT STUCK HERE LIKE A FOX IN A HOLE!



WATCHED FOR A LONG WAY BY THOSE ADMIRING YOUNG EYES, THE WEARY DESERT PATROL HEADED BACK TO THE FIELD HOSPITAL. TWO DAYS LATER, IN CAIRO...

GET WELL SOON, SIR. THE BOYS WILL BE RARIN' TO HUNT WITH YOU AGAIN WHEN THE SAWBONES HAVE FINISHED WITH YOU!

WE'LL SEE, PETER... WE'LL SEE!

MIDDLE ROYAL HOSPITAL



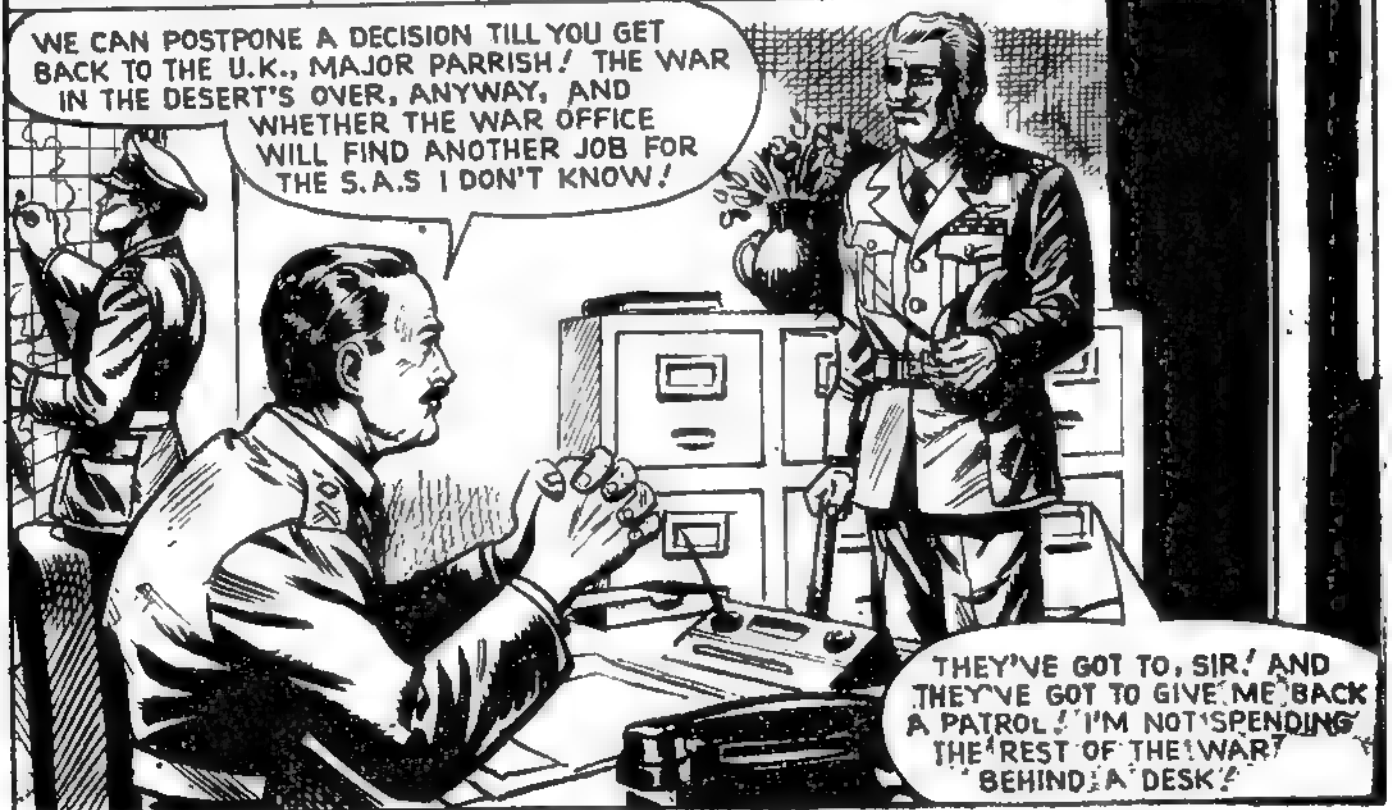
Chapter 2.

NEW COMMAND

BUT THE MAJOR'S CASE WAS FAR FROM SIMPLE. THIS WAS NO BULLET WOUND TO BE HEALED BY SURGERY, BUT A GRIEVOUS WOUND TO THE MIND. AND EVEN THOUGH OVER THE MONTHS, HE GRADUALLY RECOVERED, THE DOCTORS WERE SCEPTICAL.



THE OFFICIAL VIEW WAS THAT MAJOR SIMON PARRISH HAD FOUGHT LONG ENOUGH IN THE FIELD, NOW HE SHOULD FIGHT BEHIND A DESK. IT WAS A VIEW THE MAJOR DENIED WITH AN ALMOST DESPERATE VEHEMENCE.



BUT ALREADY ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS HAD BEEN CLEARED OUT OF NORTH AFRICA. AND NOW THE FATE OF THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE WAS HANGING IN THE BALANCE. THE MAJOR WAS STANDING GLOOMILY ON THE DECK OF THE U.K. BOUND TROOPSHIP, WHEN...



CAPTAIN MATTHEW ARMSTRONG, ON HIS WAY HOME WITH HIS BATTALION, TALKED EXCITEDLY TO THE MAJOR OF HIS DESIRE TO JOIN THE S.A.S.

YOU'VE GOT A ROMANTIC IDEA OF THE S.A.S. CAPTAIN! WE'RE NOT HEROES, AND ME LEAST OF ALL! YOU THINK YOURSELF LUCKY TO BE FIGHTING WITH THE INFANTRY INSTEAD OF PUSHING A PEN!



MATT HAD APPLIED FOR A POSTING TO THE S.A.S. AND THOUGHT THE MAJOR MIGHT HELP HIM TO OBTAIN IT. RUEFULLY HE WALKED AWAY...

I NEEDN'T HAVE BITTEN HIS HEAD OFF! HE'S YOUNG AND THE WAR OFFICE THINK I'M PAST IT! BUT THEY'VE GOT TO LET ME FIGHT AGAIN... THEY'VE GOT TO!





UNCERTAINTY AS TO THE FATE OF THE S.A.S. AND HIS OWN ROLE IN IT WAS MAKING THE MAJOR BITTER. BUT WHEN HE REACHED THE WAR OFFICE IN LONDON WEEKS LATER ONE QUESTION WAS SPEEDILY ANSWERED...

WELL, GENTLEMEN, THAT'S THE PICTURE—THE S.A.S. WILL BE A VITAL PART OF OUR OFFENSIVE IN EUROPE! PATROLS WILL BE DROPPED AHEAD OF OUR TROOPS TO LINK WITH THE MAQUIS AND DISRUPT THE ENEMY'S COMMUNICATIONS BEHIND THE LINES IN FRANCE! AH, MAJOR PARRISH... COME IN.



THE S.A.S. WAS TO FIGHT AGAIN! EXPANDED INTO A BRIGADE GROUP, IT WOULD HARASS THE ENEMY BEHIND THE LINES IN FRANCE. BUT WOULD THE MAJOR FIGHT WITH IT?

I HAVE MY REASON FOR WANTING TO FIGHT, SIR! TO ME IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE... OR LIVING DEATH! YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE ME A PATROL AND LET ME FIGHT AGAIN!



MAJOR, IF YOU TACKLE THE JERRIES AS FIERCELY AS YOU'VE TACKLED ME, THE JOB'S YOURS!

THE MAJOR'S SPECIAL REASON FOR WANTING TO FIGHT AGAIN WAS A SECRET HE KEPT TO HIMSELF, BUT IT GAVE HIS APPEAL A BURNING SINCERITY WHICH HAD FINALLY CONVINCED THE BRIGADIER.

YOU'LL BE POSTED TO SCOTLAND, MAJOR, WHERE YOU'LL HAVE NEW MEN TO TRAIN... ALL VOLUNTEERS... LIKE YOU!



THANK YOU, SIR! THIS MEANS MORE TO ME THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW!

TWO WEEKS LATER, AT A CAMP IN SCOTLAND, MAJOR SIMON PARRISH MET THE MEN FROM MANY UNITS WHO HAD VOLUNTEERED FOR HAZARDOUS SERVICE WITH THE S.A.S.



THE MAJOR'S GREETING FOR CAPTAIN MATTHEW ARMSTRONG WAS STILL STRANGELY BITTER. AND IN THE WEEKS OF GRUELLING TRAINING ON BARE HILLS AND STEEP CLIFFS, THE VETERAN SEEMED ALWAYS TO HAVE A SARDONIC WORD FOR THE YOUNG OFFICER...



IN THE S.A.S., OFFICERS AND MEN TRAINED, LIVED AND FOUGHT TOGETHER, AND CORPORAL STAN BURBAGE. A COCKNEY WITH A COCKNEY'S FRANKNESS, DID NOT MINCE WORDS ABOUT THE MAJOR'S TREATMENT OF MATT.





AFTER WEEKS OF PRACTICE JUMPING, FIRST FROM THE MOCK APERTURE, THEN FROM THE TETHERED BALLOON, THE TRAINEES CLIMBED INTO A WHITLEY BOMBER FOR THEIR FIRST REAL PARACHUTE DROP.

WHEN I GIVE THE ORDER 'RUNNING IN', THE FIRST MAN TAKES UP POSITION BY THE JUMPING HOLE! THE RED LIGHT IS 'ACTION STATIONS', THE GREEN LIGHT IS 'GO'! I'LL BE FOLLOWING THE LAST MAN TO JUMP, SO WATCH IT!



AS THEY APPROACHED THE DROPPING ZONE — MAJOR PARRISH TURNED TO MATT...

I'VE DECIDED NOT TO JUMP AFTER ALL, CAPTAIN. WHEN YOU'RE DOWN, ROUND UP THE MEN AND MARCH THEM BACK TO CAMP.

YES, SIR.



WATCHING THE SIGNAL LIGHT FOR THE GREEN, MATT HAD NO TIME TO WONDER AT THE MAJOR'S CHANGE OF PLAN AND THE SUDDEN UNEASINESS IN HIS VOICE. THEN CAME HIS TURN TO DROP...



BUT CORPORAL STAN BURBAGE HAD HEARD THE MAJOR'S WORDS AND MADE A SARCASTIC COMMENT.

I RECKON THE MAJOR'S GETTING TOO OLD TO JUMP, CAPTAIN... OR TOO CAUTIOUS!

CORPORAL - YOU LISTEN TO ME!



FOR THE FIRST TIME, MATT ARMSTRONG'S COOL PATIENCE DESERTED HIM. EYES BLAZING, RAW-VOICED, HE GRIPPED THE CORPORAL'S COLLAR WITH AN ANGRY HAND.

THE MAJOR WAS MAKING DROPS BEHIND THE ENEMY LINES WHILE YOU WERE LEARNING TO FORM FOURS AT CATTERICK, CORPORAL! IF I EVER HEAR YOU MAKING CRACKS LIKE THAT AGAIN, I'LL PUT YOU ON A CHARGE!

I WAS ONLY JOKING, CAPTAIN!



MAJOR SIMON PARRISH WAS STILL A HERO TO THE YOUNG INFANTRY OFFICER. HE WOULD ALWAYS ADMIRE THAT TOUGH FIGURE. WHATEVER THE MAJOR'S TREATMENT OF HIM... AND THAT TREATMENT WAS HARSH...

LOOK OUT, MATT, THE MAJOR'S ON THE 'WARPATH AGAIN! I'M GOING!





THE MAJOR ASKED MATT TO GO TO HIS OFFICE AND THERE HE SUBJECTED HIS YOUNG SUBORDINATE TO A BITTERLY ANGRY TIRADE. BEWILDERED, MATT TRIED TO PROTEST.

THE LECTURE YOU GAVE CORPORAL BURBAGE AFTER THE JUMP TODAY HAS BEEN REPORTED TO ME, CAPTAIN. MAY I MAKE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT I DO NOT NEED YOU TO IMPRESS MY HEROISM ON THE MEN...OR MY ADVANCED AGE!



THE STORM SUBSIDED. BUT IT LEFT MATT WONDERING WHY THE MAJOR WAS SO SENSITIVE ABOUT HIS AGE AND HIS IMPRESSIVE WAR RECORD OF BRAVERY.

LET'S FORGET IT NOW, SHALL WE, CAPTAIN? IN A WEEK'S TIME WE LEAVE FOR THE TRANSIT CAGE... AND FRANCE! I CAN WORK OUT MY TEMPER ON THE JERRIES THEN, EH?



A WEEK LATER SIX TWO-MEN TEAMS UNDER MAJOR PARRISH ENTRAINED FOR THE "CAGE" IN SOUTHERN ENGLAND. THIS WAS THE LOCKED CAMP IN WHICH THE S.A.S. PATROLS MADE THEIR FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE DROP INTO FRANCE.

WELL, MEN, NOW WE'RE IN THE CAGE! THE NEXT TIME THAT BARRIER OPENS FOR YOU, YOU'LL BE GOING TO WAR!



THAT LAST PERIOD OF WAITING TRIED THE MEN'S NERVES. THEY KITTED UP, PRACTISED WITH THEIR NEW CARBINES AND COLTS AND DISCUSSED TACTICS INTERMINABLY. THEN, AFTER THREE TENSE WEEKS...

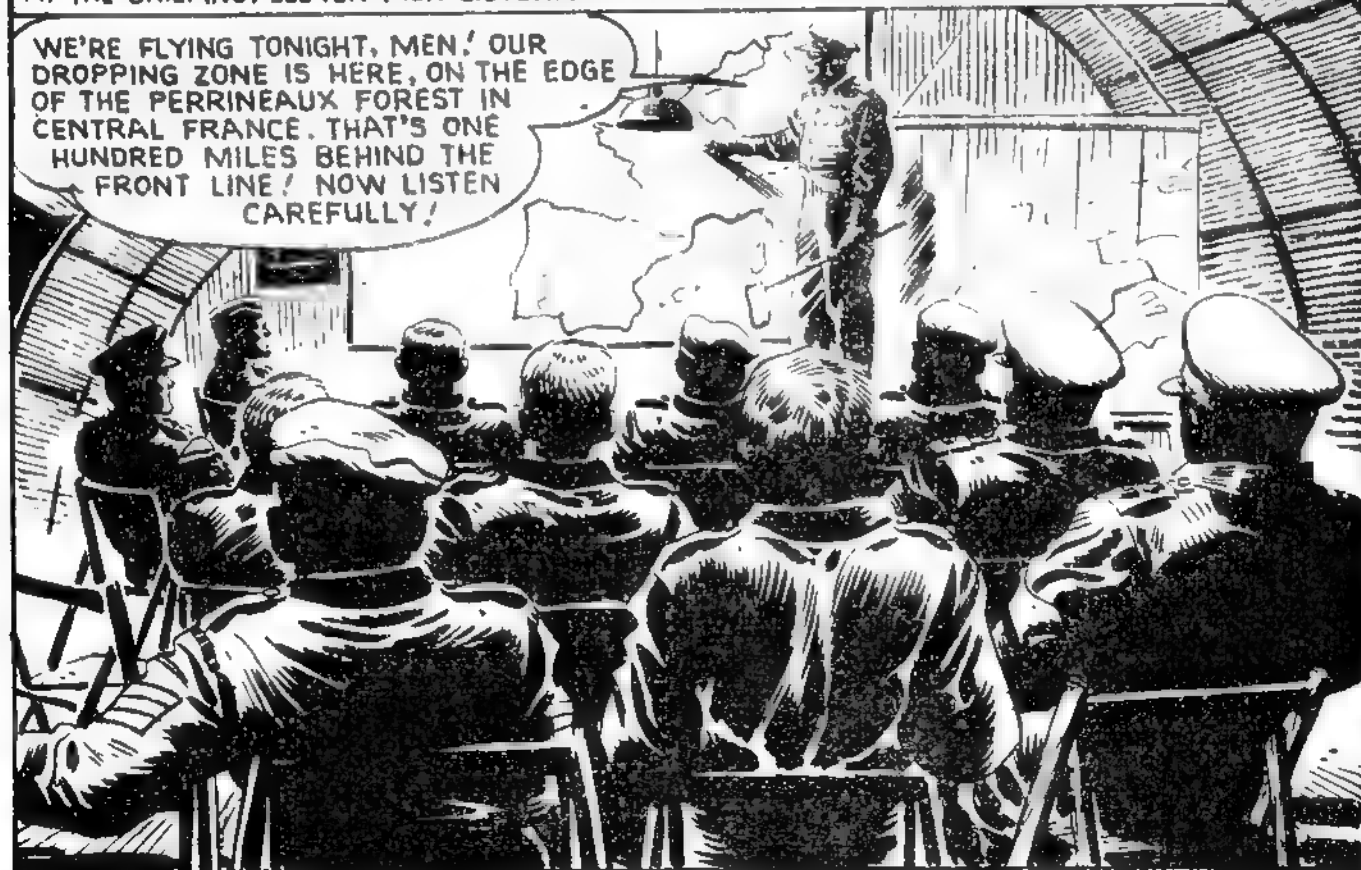
I'M GETTING CHOCKER WITH THIS WAITING, CAPTAIN. ANY NEWS OF WHEN WE'RE FLYING?

THE MAJOR'S HOLDING A BRIEFING TODAY, STAN... MAKE WHAT YOU LIKE OF THAT. AND BY THE WAY, THE OFFICERS HAVE BEEN TOLD TO PICK THEIR JEEP CREWS AND I'VE ASKED FOR YOU AS MY DRIVER!



AT THE BRIEFING, ELEVEN MEN LISTENED TO THE COOL, LEVEL VOICE OF THE MAJOR.

WE'RE FLYING TONIGHT, MEN! OUR DROPPING ZONE IS HERE, ON THE EDGE OF THE PERRINEAUX FOREST IN CENTRAL FRANCE. THAT'S ONE HUNDRED MILES BEHIND THE FRONT LINE! NOW LISTEN CAREFULLY!



# Chapter 3. OBJECTIVE IN FRANCE

THAT NIGHT THE S.A.S. MEN FOLLOWED THEIR VETERAN COMMANDER TOWARD THE WAITING STIRLING BOMBERS...



THE OTHER PLANE'S CARRYING OUR JEEPS! LET'S HOPE THEY DROP SAFELY!

LET'S HOPE WE DO!

WHEN THE AIRCRAFT WAS AIRBORNE, THE MAJOR INTRODUCED THE YOUNG CAPTAIN TO THE BIG AND BURLY SERGEANT SITTING NEXT TO HIM. IT WAS TOM MERRAL, LONG SINCE RECOVERED FROM HIS DESERT WOUND.



THIS IS TOM MERRAL, CAPTAIN! THE LAST TIME YOU MET HIM, HE WAS LYING ON A STRETCHER WITH A BULLET IN HIS SHOULDER. I GOT HIM TRANSFERRED FROM THE SECOND BATTALION TO DRIVE FOR ME AGAIN!

IT'S LIKE OLD TIMES, MAJOR!



NOW THAT THE OPERATION HAD BEGUN, THE MAJOR'S BITTERNESS HAD GONE. HE AND TOM MERRAL SHARED OLD MEMORIES OF VICIOUS DESERT BATTLES WHILE THE GIANT STIRLING DRONED ON OVER THE FRENCH COAST. THEN...



MATT ARMSTRONG STRAPPED ON HIS LEG BAG AND HANDED HIS WEBBING STATIC LINE TO THE MAJOR. CLIPPED TO THE STRAP, IT WOULD AUTOMATICALLY OPEN THE PARACHUTE AS A MAN DROPPED THROUGH THE JUMPING HOLE. AND ON THE DARK GROUND BELOW...



ON THE DROPPING ZONE, MEN OF THE MAQUIS HAD LIT THREE FIRES FIVE HUNDRED YARDS APART IN A STRAIGHT LINE. A RADIO SIGNAL FROM LONDON HAD GIVEN THEM THE CODE LETTERS TO FLASH TO THE FERRYING AIRCRAFT AS THEY SWUNG OVER THE FIRES...



EYES GLUED TO THE RED SIGNAL LIGHT, CAPTAIN MATTHEW ARMSTRONG WAITED TENSELY FOR THE ORDER TO JUMP. THE SECONDS LIMPED PAST... THEN...



AS HIS PARACHUTE OPENED MATT PULLED THE QUICK RELEASE CORD ON HIS LEG AND PAID OUT THE ROPE. THE BAG SWUNG FREE TWENTY FEET BELOW. SLOWLY HE DRIFTED DOWN TO ENEMY SOIL...



TIENS! A  
PERFECT DROP!

EVEN AS HE HIT THE GROUND, THE DIM SHAPES OF TWO HELMETED MEN ROSE FROM THE SHADOWS. FOR ONE MOMENT MATT GRIPPED HIS CARBINE WITH A SPURT OF HATRED. THEN ...



WELCOME TO FRANCE,  
MONSIEUR!

PHEW,  
FOR A MOMENT  
I THOUGHT YOU  
WERE JERRIES!



QUICKLY THE FRENCHMEN TOOK MATT TO THE SHADOW OF THE TREES WHERE THE REST OF THE MAQUIS PARTY WERE GATHERING. FROM THE SECOND STIRLING, THE JEEPS WERE DROPPING.

THAT WAS THE LAST DROP!  
DOUSE THE FIRES, COMRADES!  
VITES, VITES!



WITH PRACTISED SPEED, THE FRENCHMEN CLEARED AWAY ALL TRACES OF THE NIGHT'S WORK FROM PRYING GERMAN EYES ALMOST BEFORE THE DRONE OF THE STIRLINGS HAD DIED AWAY TO THE NORTHWEST.

I THOUGHT WE  
WERE LEAVING  
YOU BEHIND,  
MAJOR! ARE  
YOU ALL RIGHT?

WHY SHOULDN'T  
I BE, CAPTAIN?  
MOVE OVER!



THE MAJOR HAD DROPPED LAST, AND HE WAS VERY MUCH HIS OLD SELF AS HE JOINED MATT IN THE LAST JEEP. THEY HAD HARDLY REACHED THE MAQUIS CAMP, DEEP IN THE FOREST, BEFORE HE WAS MAKING PLANS WITH THE FRENCH COMMANDER.

THEN IT'S DECIDED, COMMANDANT. TOMORROW WE ATTACK OUR FIRST TARGET THE VENESSY-BEAUNE RAILWAY LINE! AND WE WORK ALONE!

PERHAPS YOU ARE WISE, MONSIEUR! MY MEN ARE BRAVE AND EAGER, BUT THEY ARE AS YET UNTRAINED FOR SUCH WORK!

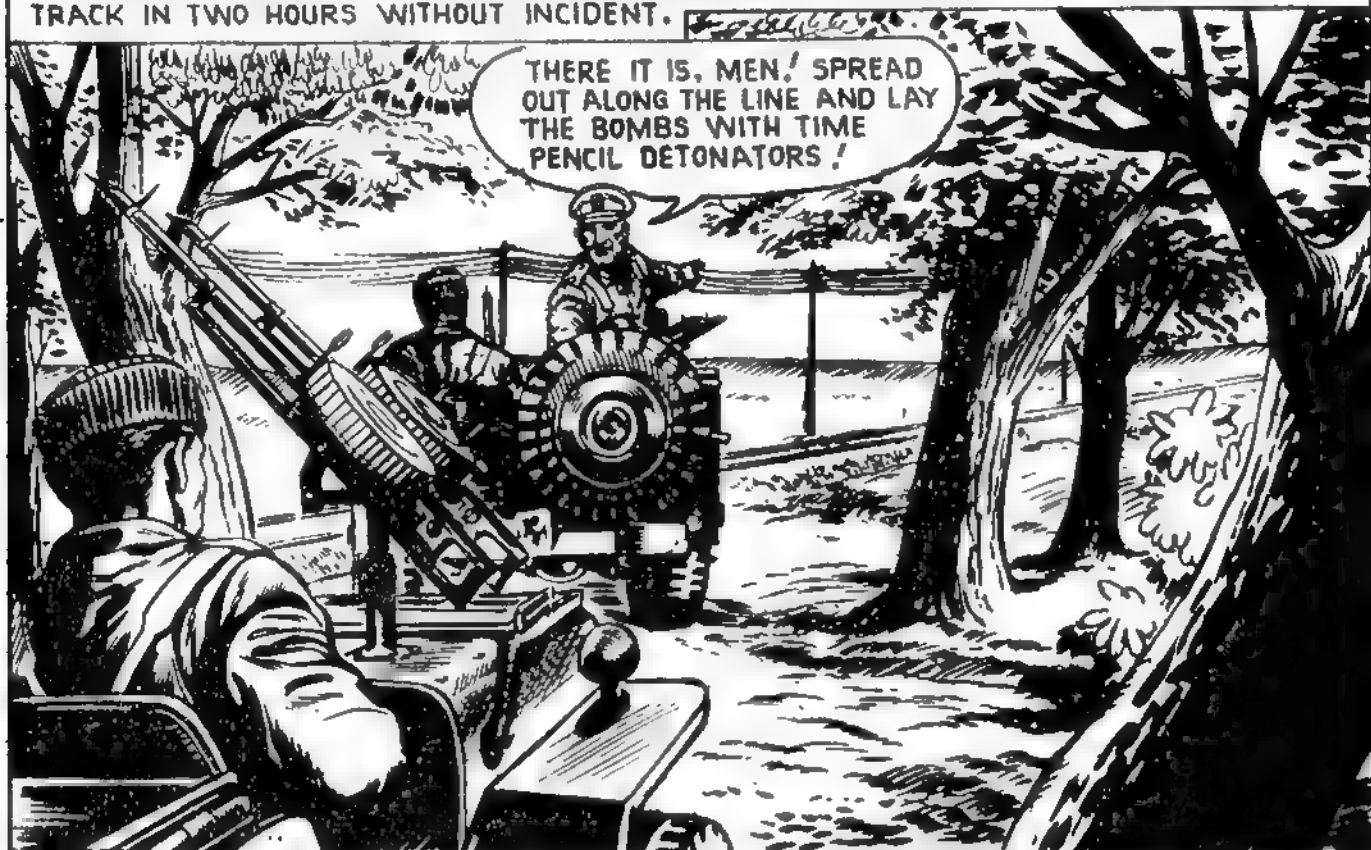


THE FRENCHMEN HAD TOLD MAJOR PARRISH THAT GERMAN TROOP AND AMMUNITION TRAINS WERE ROLLING WEST TOWARD THE BATTLEFRONT ALONG A RAILWAY LINE THIRTY MILES AWAY. IT WAS A SITTING TARGET FOR THE S.A.S.

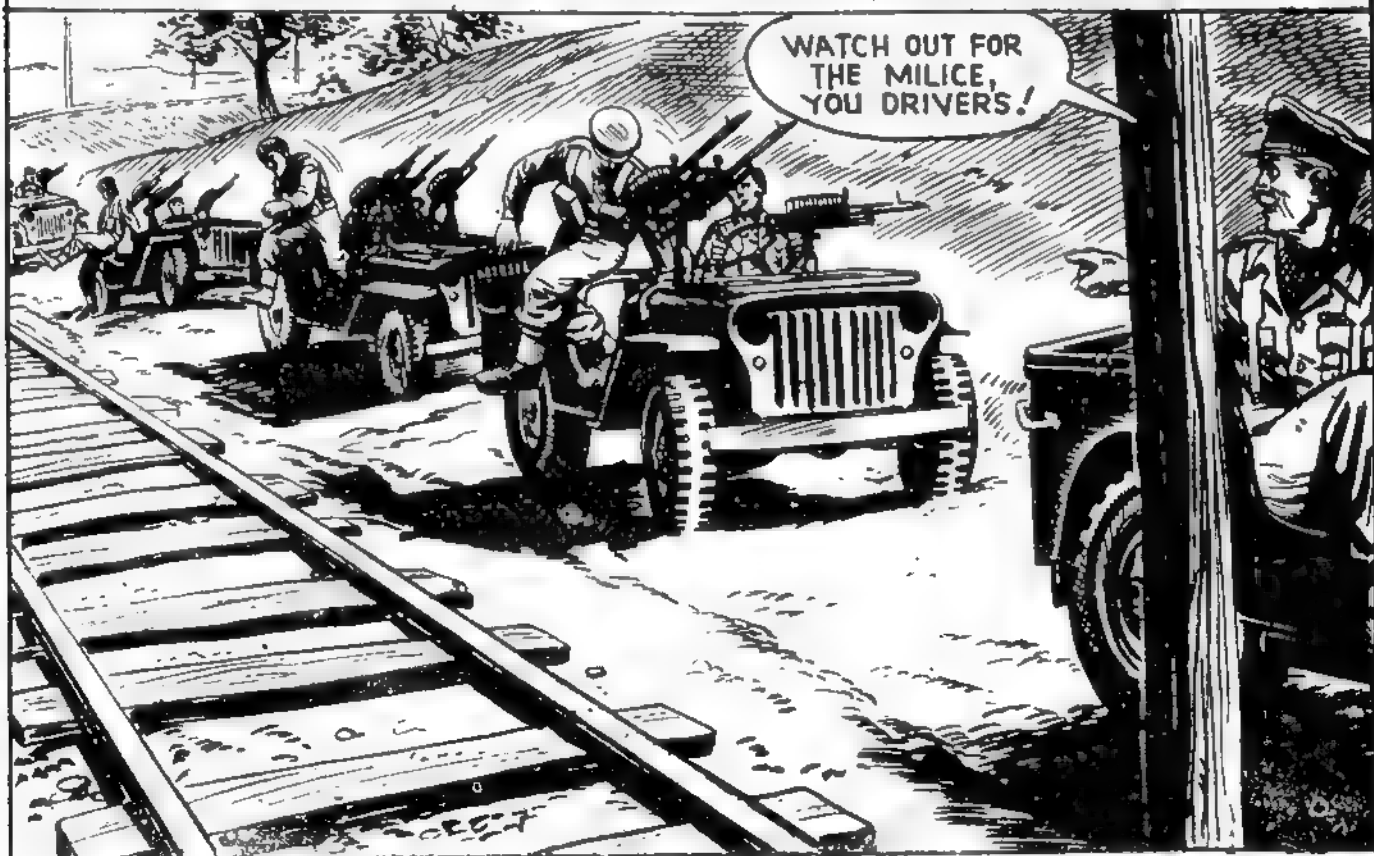
READY, MEN!  
LET'S GO!



THE GERMAN TROOPS IN THE AREA NEVER VENTURED FAR INTO THE FOREST FOR FEAR OF MAQUIS AMBUSHES. THE SIX JEEPS COVERED THE THIRTY MILES OF WOODLAND TRACK IN TWO HOURS WITHOUT INCIDENT.



THEIR OBJECTIVE REACHED, THE S.A.S. PATROL ROARED TOWARDS THE RAILWAY LINE WHILE IN EACH JEEP THE CO-DRIVER REACHED FOR HIS PACK OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE.





THE 'MILICE' WERE FRENCH RENEGADES EMPLOYED BY THE GERMANS TO GUARD THE RAILWAY LINES. BRUTAL AND TREACHEROUS AS THEY WERE, USUALLY THEY WERE AFRAID OF AN OPEN FIGHT. BUT COOL HANDS FINGERED THE TRIGGERS OF THE VICKERS GUNS.



QUICKLY MATT LAID HIS BOMBS AND BROKE THE TIME PENCIL DETONATORS. IN FIVE MINUTES THE BOMBS WOULD SHATTER THE VITAL LINK BETWEEN THE GERMAN WAR FACTORIES AND THE ARMIES AT THE FRONT.

HURRY UP, CAPTAIN, FOR PETE'S SAKE!



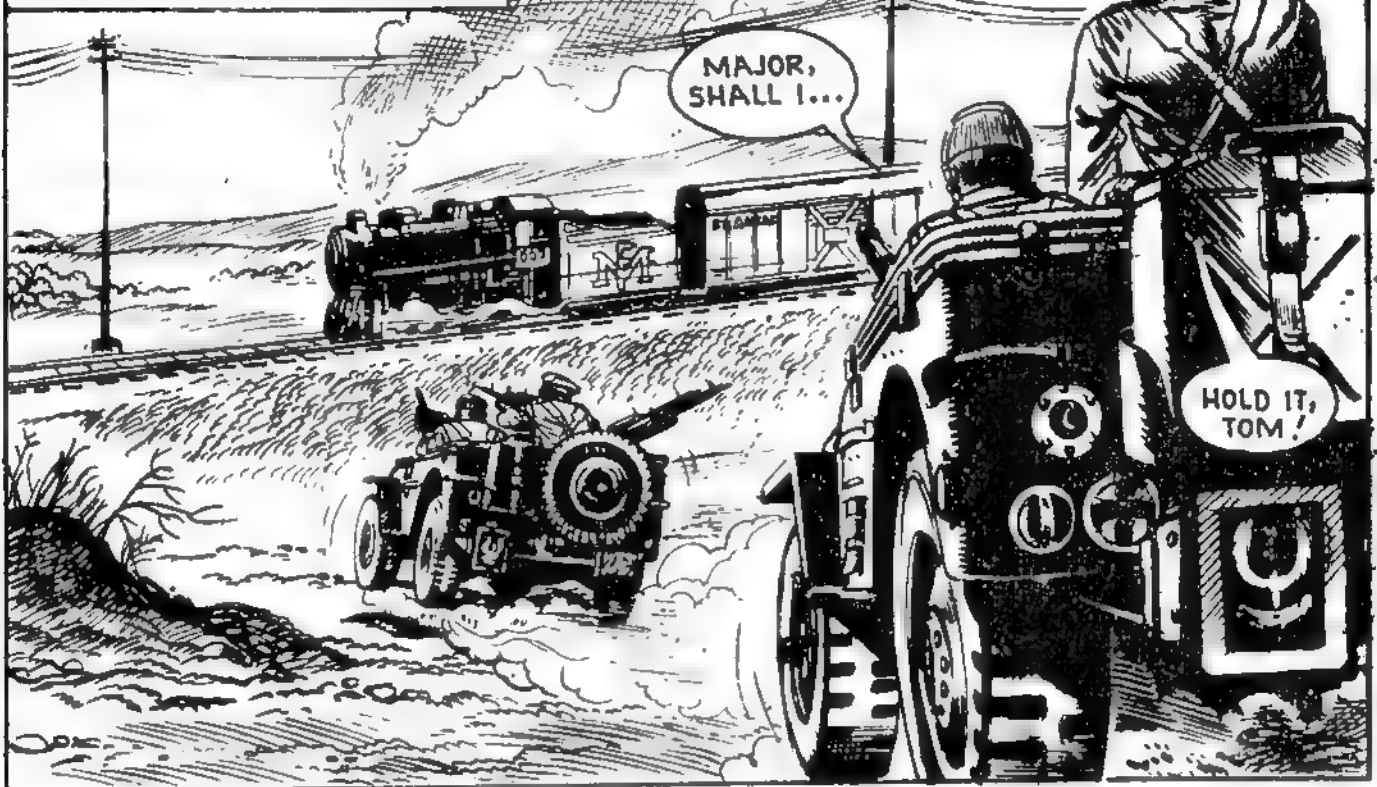
AS THE JEEPS ROARED BACK TO THE SHELTER OF THE FOREST, A PLUME OF SMOKE ROSE FAR BACK ALONG THE RAILWAY LINE ...



THE TWO JEEPS PAUSED. FACED BY THAT UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT, THE MAJOR HESITATED IRRESOLUTELY. IT WAS THE YOUNG CAPTAIN WHO ACTED.



ALONE, MATT ARMSTRONG'S JEEP SCREAMED BACK TOWARDS THE RAILWAY LINE AND THE APPROACHING TRAIN. IN A HARD, DRY VOICE, THE MAJOR MADE HIS DECISION.



ALREADY THE TRAIN HAD PASSED OVER THE FIRST OF THE LINE OF BOMBS. AS THE RANGE CLOSED RAPIDLY, MATT OPENED UP WITH THE TWIN VICKERS ...





STAN FLUNG THE JEEP IN A TIGHT TURN TO ROAR BACK ALONG THE ALREADY SHUDDERING TROOP TRAIN. THE STARTLED GERMANS DUCKED FRANTICALLY AS THE HAIL OF BULLETS LASHED AT THEM.

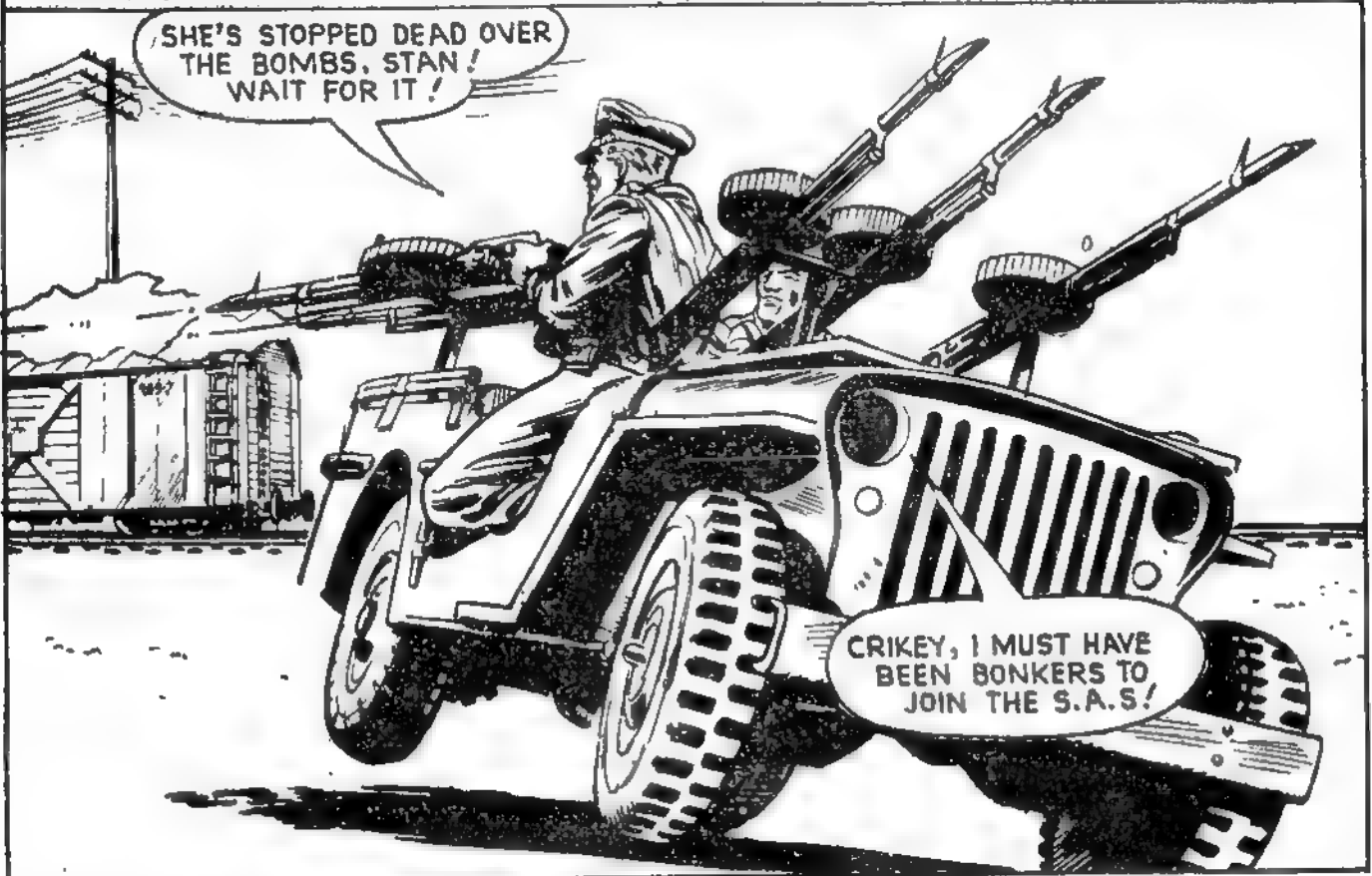


FRIGHTENED AND DEAFENED BY THE CLATTERING MACHINE GUNS, THE GERMAN SOLDIERS FELT THE TRAIN JERKING TO A HALT.

HIMMEL, WE MUST HAVE REACHED THE FRONT LINE, HEINE! AND THE TRAIN IT HAS STOPPED!



AS THE JEEP SPUN TOWARDS THE FOREST, ITS JOB DONE, MATT GAVE THE TRAIN A FINAL BURST FROM THE REAR TWIN VICKERS. WITH GRIM SATISFACTION HE SMILED.



HARDLY HAD THE JEEP PULLED UP AT THE FOREST'S EDGE THAN THE TIME BOMBS DETONATED WITH A THUNDEROUS ROAR. THE TRAIN WAS ENGULFED BY THAT TERRIBLE EXPLOSION.



THE MAJOR'S DRY VOICE RECALLED THE EXULTANT S.A.S. MEN TO THEIR PERILOUS POSITION. SOON THE JEEPS WERE SPEEDING BACK TOWARDS THEIR FOREST HIDEOUT. BUT THE MAJOR WAS GRIMLY THOUGHTFUL.

IT WAS A CRAZY THING THE CAPTAIN DID, ANYWAY, MAJOR!

WAS IT, TOM? I HAVE AN IDEA THAT TWO YEARS AGO WE'D HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES ... AND CALLED IT ROUTINE S.A.S. PROCEDURE!



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LURID SERVICE CAREER, MAJOR SIMON PARRISH WAS FEELING HIS AGE! BUT HE WAS A FAIR-MINDED MAN, AND WHEN THE JEEPS REACHED THE MAQUIS CAMP...

WELL DONE, CAPTAIN! THAT WAS A FINE EFFORT!

THANK YOU, MAJOR!



THE MAJOR'S FEW WORDS OF PRAISE BROUGHT A FLUSH OF PRIDE TO THE YOUNG CAPTAIN'S FACE. FOR SO LONG HE HAD ADMIRED THAT TOUGH AND FEARLESS VETERAN, AND NOW...

A MESSAGE FROM LONDON COMING THROUGH, MAJOR!



THE RADIO OPERATOR'S SHOUT BROUGHT THE S.A.S. COMMANDER QUICKLY TO HIS SIDE. WEAKLY ACROSS THE CHANNEL CAME THE CODED MESSAGE FROM LONDON. "HALLO SABU. HALLO SABU. MESSAGE BEGINS..."

ANOTHER JOB FOR US, MAJOR?

LOOKS LIKE IT! LONDON REPORTS A GERMAN PANZER GROUP MASSING AT LIGNE, FORTY MILES FROM HERE. IT SEEMS THE JERRIES ARE AIMING TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN OUR FRONT LINE TROOPS! DECODE THE REST, ROGERS!



THE MESSAGE FROM H.Q. COMPLETE, THE MAJOR CALLED HIS MEN TOGETHER. THEIR NEXT ASSIGNMENT WAS ALREADY LINED UP FOR THEM, AND IT WAS A TOUGH ONE.

THAT'S THE PICTURE, MEN! WE'VE GOT TO SMASH UP THAT GERMAN PANZER GROUP BEFORE IT CAN MOVE FOR THE FRONT LINE, OR THE BRITISH ADVANCE MAY BE HELD UP! WE START AT DAWN TOMORROW!





IN A COOL, EXPRESSIONLESS VOICE, THE MAJOR OUTLINED HIS PLAN TO HIS SENIOR OFFICERS. BUT THERE WAS A STRANGE TENSION IN HIS LINED FACE...

H.Q. WANTS US TO LIGHT FLARES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE JERRY TANK LEAGUER AT MIDNIGHT EXACTLY. OUR PLANES WILL BOMB ON THE FLARES! WE'LL PROBE THE ENEMY DEFENCES BEFORE NIGHTFALL TO TEST THEIR STRENGTH!



WHEN THE OFFICERS HAD LEFT HIM, THE MAJOR SAT FOR A LONG TIME BY THE DYING FIRE, THINKING ABOUT THE PAST - AND THE FUTURE.



WELL, THIS IS WHAT I WANTED... ANOTHER FIGHT! BUT I WONDER...

## Chapter 4. CEMETERY AMBUSH

IN THE CHILL LIGHT OF DAWN, THE MAQUIS COMMANDER CAME OUT TO SALUTE HIS BRITISH COMRADES -IN- ARMS AS THEY STARTED ON THEIR PERILOUS MISSION.



TWO ABREAST, THE JEEPS CREPT OUT OF THE FOREST CLEARING. SOON THEY WERE SMASHING THE COBWEBS OF MIST ALONG THE FOREST TRACKS.



FORCED TO MAKE LONG DETOURS AROUND HEAVILY GUARDED ROADS, IT WAS LATE IN THE AFTERNOON BEFORE THE S.A.S. PATROL NEARED THE SMALL FRENCH TOWN.

WATCH IT, MEN!  
THAT'S OUR OBJECTIVE  
DEAD AHEAD!



SOMEWHERE IN THAT SLEEPY-LOOKING TOWN LAY THE GERMAN TANK CONCENTRATION AND THE TROOPS GUARDING IT. THE MAJOR'S QUICK EYE SIZED UP THE TERRAIN.

FOLLOW ME! THIS'LL  
BE A QUIET ENOUGH PLACE  
FOR AN OBSERVATION  
POST!



THE CEMETERY AHEAD LOOKED AS SILENT AND LONELY AS THE MARBLE TOMBS WITHIN ITS GATES, BUT...

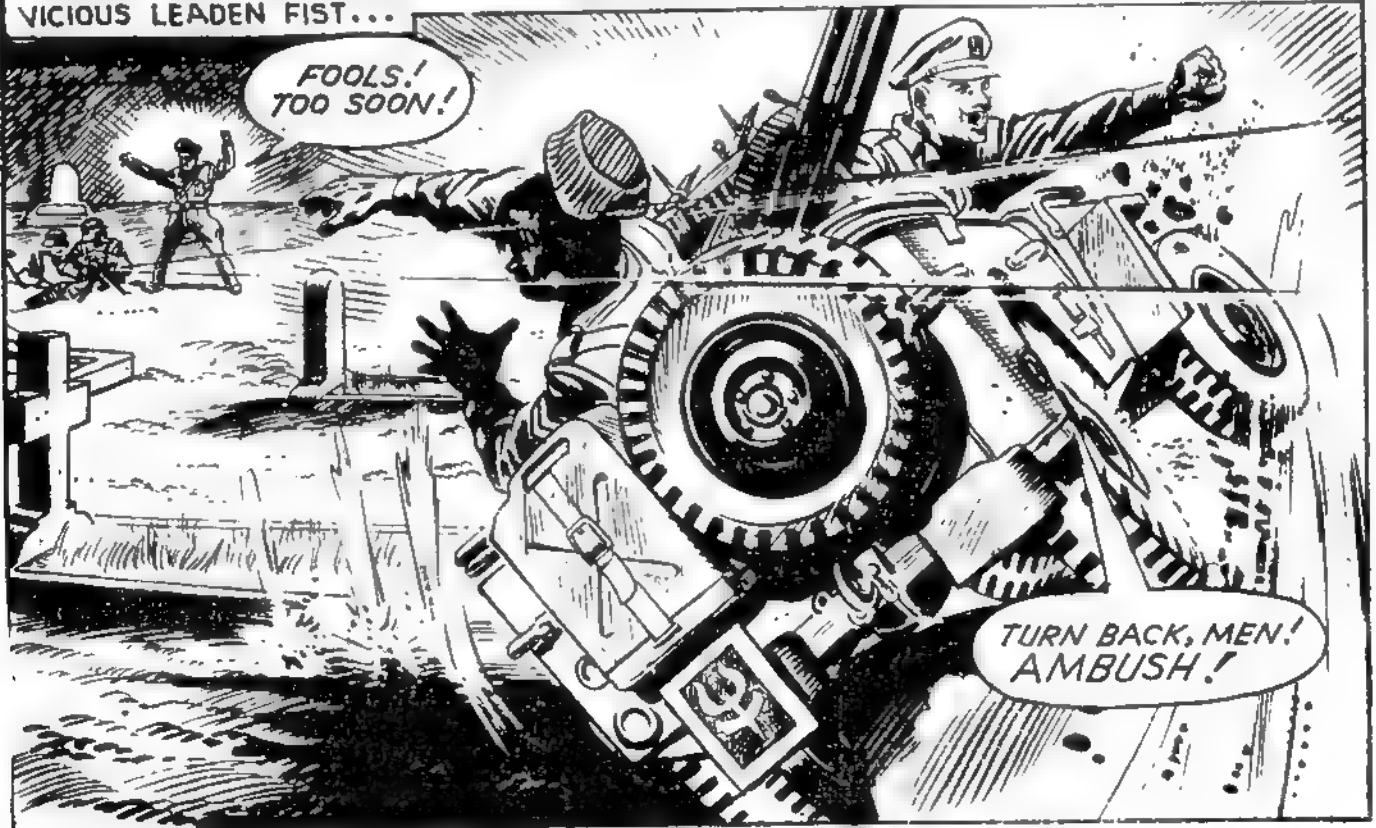
WAIT TILL ALL  
THE VEHICLES ARE  
INSIDE, MEN!



AS THE MAJOR'S JEEP TURNED IN BETWEEN THE GATES, THE FIENDISH CRACKLE OF A MACHINE GUN SPLINTERED THE SILENCE AND A HAIL OF BULLETS LASHED OUT LIKE A VICIOUS LEADEN FIST...

FOOLS!  
TOO SOON!

TURN BACK, MEN!  
AMBUSH!





THE AMBUSH HAD BEEN SPRUNG TOO SOON! THE MAJOR'S JEEP WAS A TOTAL WRECK AND TOM MERRAL HAD BEEN CUT DOWN, BUT THE FIVE OTHER JEEPS, FOREWARNED, TURNED SHARPLY BACK. AND MATT ARMSTRONG MADE A LIGHTNING DECISION...



CROUCHING BY THE STONE GATEWAY, THE YOUNG CAPTAIN FLUNG AN ORDER AT HIS RELUCTANT DRIVER...



WITH THE GERMANS ALERTED, THE SITUATION WAS HOPELESS. ONE MAN ALONE MIGHT SURVIVE BUT NO JEEP COULD EXTRICATE THE MAJOR NOW. GRIMLY, MATT TENSED HIMSELF...



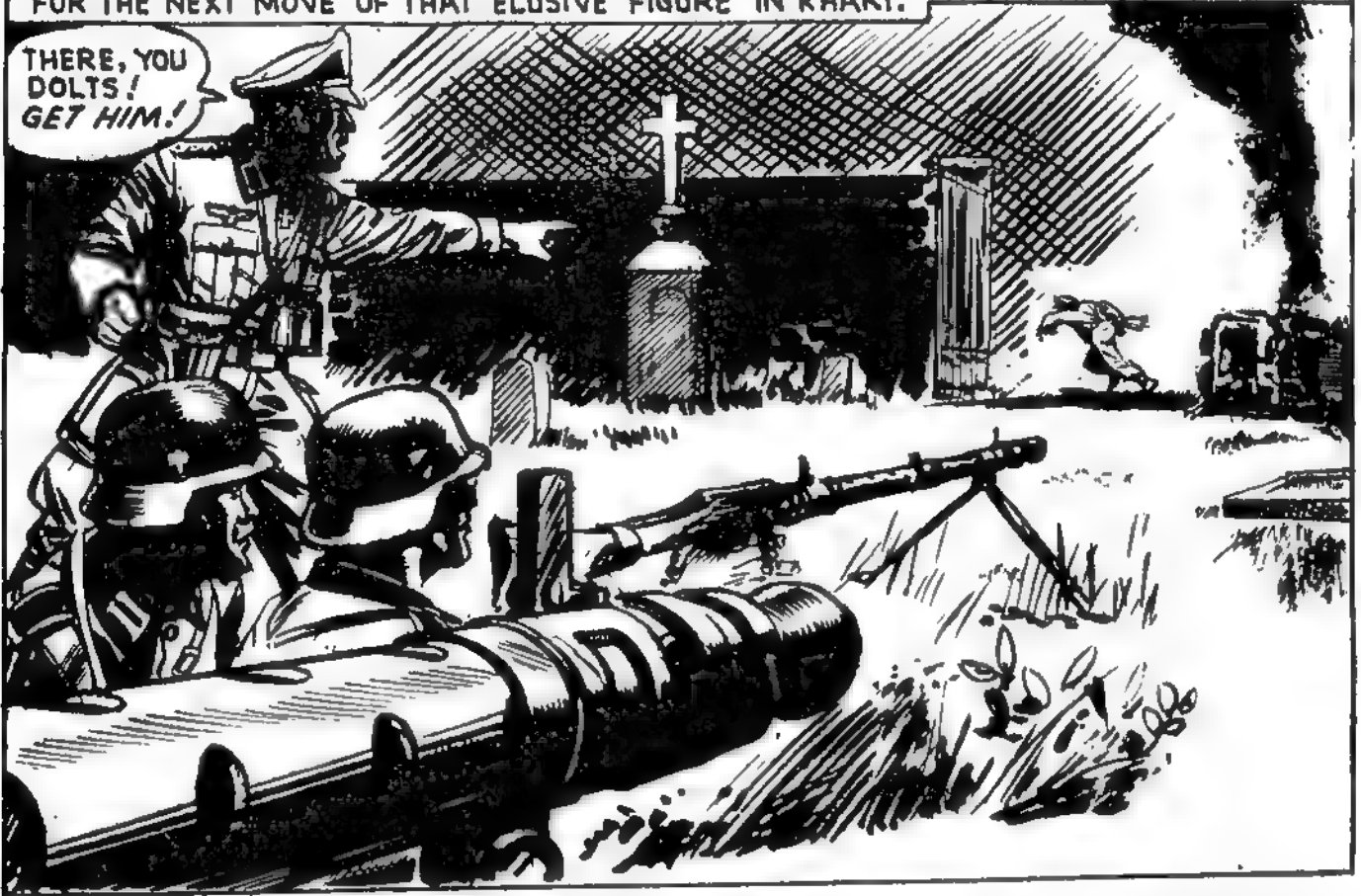
WITH ONE SWIFT LUNGE, THE YOUNG S.A.S. MAN COVERED THE OPEN TEN YARDS TO THE SHELTER OF THE BLAZING JEEP.

POOR TOM'S  
HAD IT! NOW  
WHERE'S THE  
MAJOR?



SWEATING PALMS ON THEIR HEAVY GUNS, THE GERMAN CREWS WAITED UNEASILY FOR THE NEXT MOVE OF THAT ELUSIVE FIGURE IN KHAKI.

THERE, YOU  
DOLTS!  
GET HIM!



AS THE BULLETS SPAT AROUND HIM, MATT  
DIVED FOR THE COVER OF A MARBLE  
SLAB BESIDE THE MAJOR.

IT'S OKAY, MAJOR!  
THE OTHERS HAVE  
ESCAPED!

MATT!



QUICKLY, MATT OUTLINED THE POSITION TO HIS SENIOR OFFICER. THERE WAS STILL A SLIM CHANCE OF ESCAPE.

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME, MATT. YOU DARNED YOUNG FOOL!

WE'VE STILL GOT A CHANCE, MAJOR! THOSE JERRY GUNNERS ARE JITTERY! A BURST FROM OUR CARBINES AND A SPRINT AND WE'D BE CLEAR. THE JEEPS WILL BE WAITING FOR US A MILE OR SO BACK ALONG THE ROAD.



BUT MAJOR PARRISH WAS NO LONGER THE COOL, TOUGH-AS-STEEL SOLDIER WHOM THE YOUNG CAPTAIN HAD WORSHIPPED FOR SO LONG. THE ONCE-TAUT VOICE WAS WEARY...

IT'S NO GOOD, MATT! I'VE HAD IT! LEAVE ME HERE AND SAVE YOURSELF... I'M NOT WORTH SAVING NOW!







AND AS THE ENEMY CAUTIOUSLY ADVANCED, MATT ARMSTRONG CAME TO THE BITTEREST DECISION OF HIS LIFE. FOR HIM, THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY.

ALL RIGHT, MAJOR, IF THAT'S THE WAY IT IS! BUT I'M STAYING WITH YOU!



PISTOL READY, WITH TAUTENED NERVES THE GERMAN OFFICER ROUNDED THE MONUMENT. BUT NOW THERE WAS NO RESISTANCE.

SO! RAISE YOUR HANDS, ENGLANDERS!



MENACED BY THE GERMAN RIFLES, MAJOR PARRISH AND THE SULLEN MATT WERE MARCHED OUT OF THE CEMETERY TOWARDS A COBBLED SQUARE ... AND AN UNEXPECTED SIGHT ...



THE S.A.S. MEN HAD GOT VERY NEAR TO THEIR TARGET. AND NOW, HANDS HELD IGNOMINIOUSLY HIGH, THEIR LEADERS WERE DRIVEN PAST INTO CAPTIVITY...



## Chapter 5. A DESPERATE BLUFF

THE PRISONERS WERE MARCHED INTO THE PANZER GROUP HEADQUARTERS ACROSS THE SQUARE. THERE THEY WERE SAVAGELY INTERROGATED BY A NAZI COLONEL. TIGHT-LIPPED, THEY REFUSED TO TALK.



THE NAZI FLUNG AN ORDER TO THE GUARDS AND MOODILY SURVEYED THE FLARE CANISTERS THEY HAD TAKEN FROM THE CAPTURED S.A.S. MEN. HE HAD A HUNCH THEY WERE SIGNIFICANT - BUT WHY?





THE MAJOR AND MATT WERE FLUNG BRUTALLY INTO A CELL NEXT TO THE COLONEL'S ROOM. NEXT DAY THE GERMAN TANKS WOULD WREAK HAVOC ON THE BRITISH ARMY, AND THEY HAD FAILED TO STOP THEM. WEARILY, THEY TALKED...



THE MAJOR'S VOICE WAS QUIET AND FLAT...

OUT IN THE DESERT, WHEN THE MESSERSCHMITT SHOT UP MY JEEP, THAT'S WHEN MY NERVE WENT! I WAS TOO OLD FOR S.A.S. WORK, I SUPPOSE, JUST AS THE RED TABS TOLD ME. BUT I WOULDN'T ADMIT IT - I COULDN'T! I HAD TO FIGHT AGAIN TO PROVE TO MYSELF I HADN'T LOST MY NERVE. AND NOW...



THE VOICE DIED. DARKNESS GATHERED IN THE BARE ROOM. THE TWO MEN SAT IN A SILENCE PAINFUL WITH BITTERNESS WHILE THE HOURS PASSED. THEN ...

I'VE BEEN THINKING, MATT, ABOUT THE WAY I NEEDED YOU DURING TRAINING! I SUPPOSE I RESENTED YOUR YOUTH, YOUR COURAGE! IF IT'S NOT TOO LATE ...

FORGET IT, MAJOR, AND TAKE A LOOK!



HIS APOLOGY CUT SHORT BY THE URGENCY IN MATT'S VOICE, THE MAJOR SAW FOR THE FIRST TIME A CHINK OF LIGHT NEAR HIS SHOULDER. IT WAS A KEYHOLE IN THE LOCKED COMMUNICATING DOOR... CAUTIOUSLY HE MOVED HIS HEAD ...



IN THE INTERROGATION ROOM, THE NAZI COLONEL WAS STILL PUZZLING OVER THE FLARES. IT WAS NEARLY MIDNIGHT, MAJOR PARRISH WITHDREW HIS HEAD FROM THE DOOR AND FROWNEED GRIMLY...

THE R.A.F. BOMBERS MUST BE DUE OVER AT ANY MINUTE! IF ONLY WE COULD GET HOLD OF THOSE FLARES! BUT IT'S HOPELESS. THE ROOM'S FULL OF JERRIES!

AND IT'S I WHO HAS FAILED! WELL, IT CAN'T MATTER NOW, SO...



SUDDENLY THE MAJOR SCRAMBLED TO HIS FEET AND CALLED TO THE GUARD IN A WEAK BUT DESPERATE VOICE.

TAKE ME TO YOUR COLONEL, GUARD. I AM WILLING TO TALK!

MAJOR...



MATT WATCHED IN HORROR. PERHAPS THE OLD SOLDIER HAD BROKEN UNDER THE STRAIN, BUT SURELY THAT LION-HEART WAS NOT CAPABLE OF BETRAYAL.

THE OLD FOOL HAS WEAKENED, HEINRICH TAKE HIM TO THE COLONEL.

DON'T DO IT, MAJOR!



WHEN THE DOOR HAD CLOSED ON THE MAJOR, MATT SANK BACK HOPELESSLY TO THE FLOOR. HE WAITED UNTIL THE GUARD'S ATTENTION WANDERED. THEN...





INSIDE THE INTERROGATION ROOM BEYOND THE DOOR, THE GLOATING NAZI LISTENED TO THE FALTERING VOICE OF MAJOR SIMON PARRISH. THE VETERAN S.A.S. MAN WAS TELLING EVERYTHING!



AND THEN, AS HE PICKED UP THE FLARE, A SUDDEN CHANGE CAME OVER THE WEAK FIGURE OF THE MAJOR. THE SIGNS WERE TOO SMALL FOR THE NAZI GUARDS TO NOTICE, BUT EVERY MUSCLE IN THAT STILL-POWERFUL BODY HAD TENSED...



LIKE A SUDDENLY UNLEASHED SPRING, THE MAJOR'S HAND SNATCHED UP ANOTHER FLARE AND WENT TO FLING IT INTO THE TANK PARK. BUT THE COLONEL'S GUN WAS ALREADY OUT... AND HE FIRED ...



THE MAJOR'S ACTION HAD BEEN SUICIDAL. MATT JERKED BACK FROM HIS SPYHOLE IN ANGUISH... AND SAW HIS OWN SLENDER CHANCE ...

ACH, WHAT IMBECILE HAS EXPOSED A LIGHT BY THE TANKS... AND WITH AIRCRAFT OVERHEAD!



THE GUARD WAS GAPING AT THE WHITE BLAZE OF THE FLARE OUTSIDE IN THE TANK PARK. EVEN AS MATT'S STEELY FINGERS CLOSED ON THAT THICK NECK, HE HEARD THE SOUND OF AIRCRAFT APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTH.

GOT YOU, SQUAREHEAD!



SLOWLY THE GUARD WENT LIMP UNDER THAT RELENTLESS GRIP. QUICKLY MATT GRABBED THE AUTOMATIC GUN. NOW LIGHTNING INSTINCT HAD TAKEN OVER FROM THOUGHT. HE FACED THE COMMUNICATING DOOR AND SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER...



THE DOOR SHATTERED UNDER THAT HAIL OF BULLETS. IN A FLASH, THE S.A.S. MAN WAS SPRAYING THE INTERROGATION ROOM WITH A WITHERING BURST OF LEAD...

DOWN.  
YOU CURS!



CAUGHT UNPREPARED, THE GERMANS CRUMPLED BEFORE THE CHATTERING FURY OF THE SINGLE GUN. AND AS MATT SNATCHED UP ONE OF THE FLARES AND THREW IT THROUGH THE WINDOW, A WEAK VOICE SPURRED HIM ON...

CARRY ON, MATT!  
I'M ALL RIGHT!

THE RAF BOYS ARE  
OVERHEAD, MAJOR!  
WE'RE STILL IN THE  
GAME WITH A  
CHANCE!





MAJOR PARRISH WAS ALIVE, ONLY WOUNDED BY THE COLONEL'S BULLET. HE WATCHED HIS JUNIOR COMMANDER LOB FLARE AFTER FLARE AMONGST THE TANKS OUTSIDE, AND SIX THOUSAND FEET ABOVE IN THE NIGHT SKY...



FOR A LONG TEN SECONDS IN THE DEATHLIKE SILENCE OF THE INTERROGATION ROOM, MATT AND THE MAJOR HEARD THE THROBBING ROAR OF THE AIRCRAFT OVERHEAD, THEN...



THE FIRST BOMB FELL WITH A LONG WHISTLING ROAR DEAD IN THE CENTRE OF THE FLARES. TWENTY PRECIOUS GERMAN TANKS DISINTEGRATED UNDER THAT FIRST STICK. AND IN THE SHAKING PANZER HEADQUARTERS...

IT WAS YOU WHO DID IT, MAJOR! BUT IT WAS SHEER SUICIDE!

I KNOW, MATT! THAT'S WHAT I MEANT IT TO BE! WHAT GOOD WAS I ANY MORE TO THE S.A.S. - AN OLD MAN WITH SHATTERED NERVES? IT WASN'T BRAVERY... I WANTED TO BE KILLED!

THE MAJOR'S VOICE WAS NO LONGER WEAK. IT HAD GAINED A NEW VITALITY AS THOUGH THE SHADOW OF FEAR HAD BEEN LIFTED BY THAT LAST DESPERATE ACTION. BUT NOW THE BOMBS WERE SLACKENING.

WE'LL ARGUE ABOUT THAT LATER, MAJOR. NOW WE'VE GOT TO GET GOING. AND, BY HEAVENS, LOOK...



AS THE TWO MEN STUMBLED INTO THE GLARE OF THE BURNING TANKS, A FAMILIAR WHINE OF POWERFUL JEEP ENGINES DRAGGED THEM TO AN ASTONISHED HALT ...

WE WERE WAITING OUTSIDE THE TOWN WHEN WE SAW THE FLARES GO UP, MAJOR. HOW DID YOU MANAGE IT, FOR PETE'S SAKE ?

LET'S TALK LATER, STAN! THE JERRIES WILL BE RECOVERING FROM THE SHOCK SOON!





FIVE MINUTES LATER, ON THE ROAD LEADING BACK TO THE SAFETY OF THE FOREST HIDE-OUT, THE MAJOR LOOKED AT MATT WITH A STRAIGHT, FIRM SMILE OF RESPECT.

AFTER THIS, I THINK I'LL SETTLE FOR THAT DESK IN WHITEHALL! AND MY FIRST ORDER WILL BE TO PROMOTE CAPTAIN MATTHEW ARMSTRONG TO FIELD COMMAND OF AN S.A.S. GROUP IN PLACE OF MYSELF.

IF I DO MY DUTY AS FINELY AS MAJOR SIMON PARRISH DID, THEN I'LL HAVE REASON TO BE PROUD!

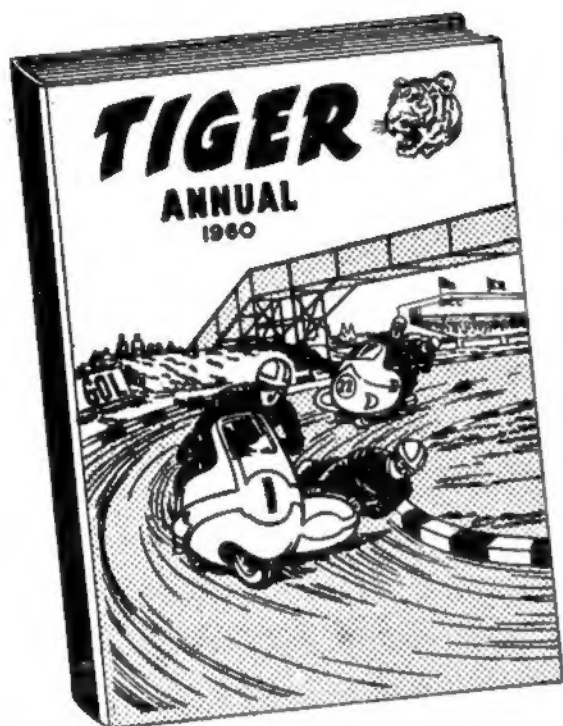


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